Plato and the Virtue of Courage

LINDA R. RABIEH

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To Bernice and Anthony Rebuck

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The Problem of Courage

THE RETURN OF COURAGE

Courage is an essential political virtue and should be of serious interest to anyone interested in politics. Indeed, if only because the courage of its citizenry is crucial to the survival of any nation, courage is arguably the virtue that nations celebrate more than any other, including justice. Consider the lyrics of the national anthems even of liberal democracies, whose peaceable inclinations, from a historical perspective, are remarkable.[1] Bravery is the one virtue extolled by the American anthem; the Stars and Stripes wave over the home of "the brave" rather than of the just. Similarly, citizens singing the Canadian anthem repeatedly profess that they "stand on guard" for their country. Courage may thus reasonably claim a certain primacy over justice because, however important the latter is to citizenship, citizenship depends upon a nation's existence, which in turn depends upon the willingness of citizens to risk their lives for it.

The reason, however, that courage is so highly ranked among civic virtues is not merely that it is useful. For nations do not conceive of their soldiers as mere tools of war, as materiel to be expended when national emergencies arise, just like bombs and bullets. Rather, nations are keenly aware that the courageous individual often pays a high price for his courage. They treat courage less as useful than as laudable—indeed, as worthy of the highest civic honors. The highest honor bestowed by the American government is the Congressional Medal of Honor, which is awarded to someone "who distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of

duty."[2] Perhaps courage is more celebrated than justice because it signifies even greater devotion to one's fellow citizens: whereas justice means respecting and contributing to the *common* good—that is, a good in which the just individual also shares—courage often means the willingness to endanger one's own good and even one's own life for the sake of others.

To honor courage, moreover, is not merely to go through the motion of an old practice that has no place in our modern world. Examples of outstanding courage still stir modern hearts and souls. We are naturally moved upon learning such stories as that of First Lieutenant John Robert Fox, a posthumous recipient of the Medal of Honor who during World War II ordered artillery strikes on his own position as it was being overrun by the German army.[3] The popular imagination seems no less moved today than it was in the past by depictions of noble deeds in battle. Films that memorialize soldiers' heroic actions, such as *Saving Private Ryan,* continue to hold us powerfully in their grip. And these sentiments are not confined to the darkness of the theater; they have powerful public manifestations. Consider, for example, the advantage that war heroes have in politics. Voters view their heroism in war as evidence of their good character; having risked their lives for their country, they seem to have demonstrated that they are more concerned with the nation's good than with their own personal advancement and enrichment.

Such evidence indicates that, notwithstanding liberalism's inculcation of the peaceable virtues, the admiration for courage persists in the liberal era. But until recently this may not have been so apparent, if only because peaceful liberal democracies rarely call for wide-scale displays of heroic courage and therefore rarely witness its full power. This all changed on September 11, 2001. Little could remind us more vividly of the uniquely important place of courage in the panoply of virtues than the events that occurred during and in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on America on that day. In the wake of the bravery demonstrated by firefighters, police officers, emergency workers, and others, admiration for courage reemerged with full force. Americans felt in their bones the awe-inspiring character of courage—of the willingness to put oneself in harm's way, to risk one's life for the sake of others. Although we have always known that such risk is intrinsic to the tasks of soldiers, firefighters, and police officers, the scale and proximity of the day's disasters made us exquisitely aware of the full implications of the risks they face, and we reacted by openly and fervently honoring the courage we witnessed.

If Americans showed that admiration for courage still runs deep, their leaders likewise argued that courage deserves our admiration more than any other virtue.

New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani praised Winston Churchill's ranking of courage as first among the virtues, because it is what guarantees all the rest.[4] Echoing this praise in a speech to the nation two months after the attack, President George W. Bush invoked Americans' display of courage as the primary sign of the country's strength and nobility.[5] He repeatedly referred to the courage Americans had demonstrated during and after the attacks as consoling, uplifting, and inspiring the nation. Although the two months since the attack had been among the "most difficult" in the nation's history, he maintained that they had also been among "the most inspiring." This was because we had "gained new heroes" and shown that "we are a courageous nation." Moreover, the president implied that the greatness of the country *is* its citizens' courage when, in order to express the spirit of America, he invoked the last known words of Todd Beamer, the passenger who led the revolt against the terrorists on United Airlines Flight 93 that caused it to crash in a Pennsylvania field rather than into the U.S. Capitol or the White House: "Let's roll." By quoting that phrase, the president implied that America's greatness rests in its citizens' capacity to recognize when their sacrifice is needed, in their calm, resolute willingness to follow through on that recognition.

To attribute greatness to America because its citizens manifest courage is to suggest that courage is not merely a necessary or important virtue but the crowning one. But President Bush and Mayor Giuliani were not referring to just any kind of courage. For, after all, we speak of several types of courage. We find impressive the courage ascribed to someone who endures disease, poverty, or some other misfortune well, and even the courage attributed to someone who acts boldly and resolutely with a view to his own interests. But these are not the forms of courage that moved us in the wake of September 11. The courage celebrated by the mayor and the president—and by the American people—is a distinctive type of courage, the stuff of traditional epic poetry. It is the courage that, at least traditionally, has most inspired awe and excited the imagination—the heroic courage of those who knowingly and willingly put themselves at death's door.[6] It is this type of courage that is the primary, though not the exclusive, subject of this book.

With the renewed attention to this kind of courage, however, we have also seen—if less visibly—the revival of questions about courage, consideration of which compels us to reflect on what we mean by courage and to whom and to what actions we can properly attribute it. To take a simple example, were the terrorists cowards? Both President Bush and Mayor Giuliani, among many others, belittled them as such.[7] Neither thought he had to explain why he did so. In one sense, why one should attribute cowardice to the terrorists seems clear enough: they launched a surprise attack on civilians. But some leading American intellectuals quickly took

exception to this attribution. Susan Sontag, for example, objected that "[in] the matter of courage (*a morally neutral virtue*): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards."[8] What she meant by calling courage "morally neutral" was later clarified by Stanley Fish, who approvingly cited Sontag's remark and explained that courage is a "quality that someone can display in the performance of a bad act."[9] Sontag's perspective provoked a furious backlash, particularly once it was aired by the late-night talk show host Bill Maher, who said of the terrorists, "Staying in the airplane when it hits the building, say what you want about it, it's not cowardly."[10] Many were outraged that anyone would attribute courage to such actions. Indeed, the statement was so controversial that it led advertisers and affiliates to abandon the program, resulting in its ultimate cancellation; it even provoked a response from the presidential spokesperson.[11]

As offensive as claims about the moral neutrality of courage may be, they raise profound puzzles about the nature of courage. Although it is true that the terrorists acted furtively and duplicitously and attacked civilians, can taking over a plane and flying it into a building simply be dismissed as cowardly? Did not the act require boldness, steadfastness, single-mindedness, and, above all, a willingness to die—all qualities we normally associate with courage? Do we not at times speak of soldiers fighting for enemies we regard as evil—for example, German soldiers during World War II—as courageous? Perhaps the difficulty can be resolved in this way: as we just observed, there are different kinds of courage, and we can concede one kind to the terrorists without having to accord them the whole of virtue. But if it is clear that there are different kinds of courage, why did attributing courage to the terrorists occasion such outrage? Why not simply recognize that the terrorists were being granted only the kind of courage that appeared to be their due—a "morally neutral" kind? However much there is to be said for the position expressed by Sontag, it also seems fundamentally wrong to attribute the *virtue* of courage, by which we mean something to be celebrated and honored, to individuals whose "courageous" acts seem utterly wicked.

Far from being new, the recent debate about the true nature of courage has an ancient lineage. The respective claims about the moral neutrality of courage recall Socrates' famous, if paradoxical, thesis of the unity of virtue. That thesis rests on the proposition that virtue is knowledge. It may be briefly, if imperfectly, summarized as follows: one cannot act virtuously without knowing what should be done, and if one knows what should be done, then one will act virtuously. One implication of this thesis is that virtue is, in the deepest sense, single, because the knowledge of what to do is comprehensive. Thus, for example, one must be just in order to be courageous because one would have to know whether the antici-

pated ends justified the exercise of courage. Such a thesis in many ways defies common sense: it would be difficult to attribute *any* virtue to anyone because it would be difficult to attribute *all* virtues to anyone. But courage challenges Socrates' thesis perhaps more than any other virtue. First, notwithstanding the uproar that followed Sontag's and Maher's statements, do we not (as I just indicated) at times describe unjust human beings as courageous? Was "Stonewall" Jackson necessarily not courageous because he fought for the South (and slavery) during the American Civil War? Second, does not courage seem very different from knowledge in that it is pure guts more than anything else that enables individuals to take the enormous risks that courage often demands?[12] On the other hand, just as it seems troubling to call courage morally neutral, is it not also troubling to call courageous anyone who runs great risks, no matter how foolish?

If the events of September 11 have placed one major question about courage squarely before us—namely, who may properly be said to possess it—they may have obscured a related and perhaps more vexing issue: the status of courage as a virtue, let alone as *the* virtue. When considering whether an unjust individual can be called courageous, we assume that courage is a virtue and that it is something good to have. But however much we admire courage, our admiration for it, on reflection, turns out to be quite complex. Much as we admire the courageous individual who confronts death nobly, we do not know quite how to think of his actions because of the high price he may have to pay. On the one hand, heroic action often costs the hero his happiness. Indeed, because it does so, it is admiration rather than pity that we feel for him; we view his action not as a pure sacrifice but as marking his ascent to a higher plane of human existence. Courage receives high praise because, as one writer put it, "to freely permit one's own destruction in lonely and terrible circumstances . . . seems a uniquely difficult type of act" (Walton 1986, 9). On the other hand, while we admire the courageous hero, we do not simply congratulate him for his achievement; rather, we offer tears, monuments, and memorials both in recognition of his excellence and as a kind of compensation for his willingness to sacrifice it. We recognize that those who have given their lives have sacrificed for the rest of us in a way for which they can never be adequately compensated. The difficulty inherent in these conflicting feelings may be simply stated: the reason that courage is praised conflicts with the view that virtue is worth having because it contributes to and even constitutes our true well-being and flourishing. We may thus legitimately wonder to what degree or in what way courage can be called a virtue.

The question of courage's status as a virtue tends to be less prominent when courage is most needed and when its sacrifices are painfully vivid, but, like the

relation of courage to justice and knowledge, this question is no less critical to a thorough understanding of courage. Indeed, this question also has an ancient lineage and figures prominently in Aristotle's brief but incisive treatment of courage in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth *NE*). Aristotle is famous for arguing that virtuous action is the core of happiness (see *NE* 1098a7–17), and he does not hesitate to speak of courage as a virtue. But he also does not hesitate to confront the degree of sacrifice involved in courage. He observes that although "death and wounds will be painful for a courageous man and he will suffer them unwillingly," such a man will nonetheless endure them because "it is noble to do so and base to do otherwise" (*NE* 1117b7–9).[13] Indeed, Aristotle emphasizes the greatness of the sacrifice that courageous individuals must sometimes make: "The closer a man is to having virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more pain will death bring him. Life is more worth living for such a man than for anyone else, and he stands to lose the greatest goods, and he realizes that fact, and this is painful" (*NE* 1117b11–14).

Precisely because virtue is constitutive of happiness, the losses that courage can entail for a courageous individual are all the greater, according to Aristotle; the courageous man's sacrifice is necessarily the sacrifice of a supremely happy life, because happiness consists in the possession and exercise of virtue. Yet the fact that courage can lead to the loss of one's life, and therewith of the happiness that exercising the virtues is supposed to constitute, does not lead Aristotle to conclude that courage is not a virtue. That a tension exists between courage and happiness is not a fatal blow to courage because the view that virtue and happiness fit together harmoniously is not the only relevant perspective.

Taking his cues from respectable opinion (see *NE* 1095b4–9), Aristotle also affirms that the end of virtue is "acting nobly" (*kalon, NE* 1115b13), and it is at least arguable that acting nobly requires a certain disregard for one's own happiness. Indeed, Aristotle doesn't just say that courageous individuals endure death and wounds because doing so is noble. Of the courageous man who fully realizes how much his deeds may cost him, he says that "he is no less courageous for that, and perhaps rather more so, since he chooses noble deeds in war in return for suffering pain" (*NE* 1117b13–14). As disquieting as it may be to consider that pain attends the choice of noble deeds, a common reaction to the courageous acts of others seems to confirm the link between suffering and nobility. We shed tears because we suspect that the courageous individual has suffered something terrible for his noble deeds. Aristotle's treatment of courage starkly presents a problem inherent in the human longing for happiness. We want to be happy, yet we think that true happiness means leading a virtuous rather than merely a long and

pleasant life. But insofar as it is noble, virtue seems at times to conflict with the happiness we seek. It is perhaps partly in order to inspire reflection on this conundrum that Aristotle insists that courage has its place above all on the battlefield, where "a man is faced by the greatest and noblest of dangers" (*NE* 1115a29–30; cf. 1095b9–13, 1099a22–30). But the problem Aristotle describes is not limited to the courage exercised on the battlefield; it would apply to any courage which takes its bearings by the willingness to sacrifice one's life because it is noble to do so.

Aristotle's discussion of courage crystallizes the importance of studying courage: because courage makes great—potentially the greatest—demands on us, thoughtful human beings cannot help but be deeply troubled by the questions it raises. For guidance in exploring these questions, this book turns to Plato. First, because of the importance of warfare to the small and intensely political cities of antiquity, ancient philosophers devoted great attention to courage (*andreia*). Second, while many ancient thinkers discuss courage, none rivals Plato's treatment in its depth and scope. Plato gives the theme of courage significant attention in a number of dialogues. One need only compare the treatment of courage in the two other great chroniclers of Socrates' life to see just how prominently it features in Plato. Aristophanes, for example, portrays Socrates as the epitome of unmanliness (*Clouds* 510). And in Xenophon's presentation, Socrates persistently treats courage as a merely instrumental virtue (see especially *Memorabilia* III.4, 9; IV.6.9–11, 13–14).

In the course of his extensive treatment of courage, Plato subjects it to a searching, if respectful, critical analysis. Plato has both the highest regard for the noble aspirations that express themselves in great displays of courage and serious reservations about its traditional form. He offers a sympathetic yet richly complex portrait of courage that illuminates its many dimensions—its noble aspirations, its dangerous excesses, its peculiar relationship to wisdom. Plato thinks about the importance of courage to human life broadly and suggests a connection between the heroic or noble courage that most attracts attention and the interior or philosophic courage that need never be noticed.

Precisely because courage has such a prominent place in Plato's writing, it is a particularly fruitful path to understanding Plato's teaching on virtue more generally, especially that strange Socratic thesis that virtue is wisdom. As we have seen, courage poses the greatest challenge to this thesis, since it seems to be the one virtue that can be had without wisdom or justice. By studying Plato's treatment of courage, then, this book aims to shed light both on the nature of courage and on the thought of Plato.

A MODERN APPROACH TO COURAGE

In order better to appreciate the richness and complexity of the Platonic treatment, it is worthwhile to survey briefly modern discussions of courage, to the extent that they exist. Mainstream liberal thought devotes little attention to courage, and, as we will see, this neglect may be inextricably tied to the fundamental concerns of liberalism. We might expect to find a sustained treatment in works belonging to the school of thought known as "virtue ethics," which makes the recovery of virture within liberalism a central theme. Perhaps the leading representative of "virtue ethics" is Alasdair MacIntyre, who in his seminal work *After Virtue* (henceforth *AV*) embarks upon what he characterizes as a neo-Aristotelian project to make the virtues the core of moral life. In doing so, MacIntyre painstakingly elaborates a highly nuanced account of a rational standard for identifying and defending the virtues. To summarize this account briefly, he suggests that the virtues are those qualities necessary to sustain serious human activities or "practices" that become central to an individual's life based on the particular story or narrative of that life and the larger tradition in which that life finds itself. While this formal definition goes far in addressing, after a fashion, what MacIntyre understands to be the limitations of ancient accounts of virtues (see especially *AV* 160–64), it fails to address the many complexities within the virtues themselves.

This is particularly evident in MacIntyre's treatment of courage. *After Virtue* treats courage only briefly, as an instrumental virtue, needed to sustain the "care and concern for individuals, communities and causes which is so crucial to so much in practices" (*AV* 192; see 192–203 more generally). In response to the objection that MacIntyre himself offers, and which we have seen emerged with the 9/11 terrorists—namely, that courage can sustain unjust practices—MacIntyre disappoints the serious investigator of courage. He responds only that he must allow the existence of courageous but unjust acts, or else he would run contrary both to what he claims is empirical fact and to his critique of the notion that the possession of one virtue requires the possession of all (*AV* 200; see also 163–64, 223). MacIntyre does not explore this difficulty with courage because he does not see it as a difficulty. Put simply, MacIntyre's treatment of courage is limited because it *presupposes* a fundamental disunity of the virtues. This, however, raises many questions about courage's status as a virtue; as Plato's interlocutors in the *Laches* quickly discover, for example, insisting upon the distinctiveness of each of the virtues has awkward implications. If courage can be a virtue without being exercised in a just cause, then one could argue that it should be honored whether

its end is noble or whether it is deployed in a foolish or unjust way. And yet, as we observed earlier, human beings resist—with good reason—the notion that the criminal or madman should be honored as much as the soldier simply because he was capable of a dangerous or risky act.

Because MacIntyre presupposes the disunity of the virtues, he fails to explore the consequences of this position for the particular virtues themselves. This failure means that he is never obliged to explain what makes a particular characteristic or quality a virtue. In the case of courage, is it the degree of sacrifice, its benefit to others, or its benefit to the courageous man himself?[14] Because he does not pursue these questions, MacIntyre can easily describe the virtues as qualities "required to sustain the kinds of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for the philosophical enquiry about the good" (1984, 219). While this summary has a certain common-sense appeal, it obscures difficulties. For example, does courage count as such a virtue? While it may be necessary for the common good, courage exercised on behalf of that good may put at stake one's ability to pursue "philosophical enquiry." MacIntyre does not press the question of whether the virtues that promote a workable common good may differ from and even compete with those that promote individual fulfillment.

MacIntyre may well be willing to live with such tensions. After all, he asserts that human beings are ultimately in a tragic situation with no rational way of prioritizing certain competing goods in our lives (*AV* 143, 157, 200, 223). If this position is correct, it is not clear how MacIntyre can attain what he says he wants—a rationally defensible account of the virtues. If certain virtues, as we have just discussed, are best suited to achieve certain goods rather than others and each of these goods is equally important to our lives, MacIntyre's position leaves the status of the virtues opaque, for the virtues—just like the competing goods—are not prioritized. MacIntyre's apparent justification for slighting the tensions within the virtues gravely undermines his project. Moreover, MacIntyre's position is at least partly rooted in an incomplete understanding of Plato, which leads him to dismiss Plato's analysis too quickly. For example, he attributes to Plato a false naïveté when he says that Plato insists that, both within the city and the individual, virtue and conflict are mutually incompatible (*AV* 141); in fact, the perfectly just city that Plato elaborates in his *Republic* pursues—and, according to Socrates, ought to pursue—a dubiously just foreign policy.[15] As for Plato's view of the unity of virtue in the individual soul, MacIntyre implies that it is rooted in a "commitment" and derived from an *a priori* theory (*AV* 140–41). He appears either to overlook or to ignore the evidence for the unity-of-virtue thesis that is re-

vealed by and through Socrates' conversations, namely, virtue's dependence on wisdom about the good. The adequacy of Plato's evidence for the unity of virtue can, of course, be disputed. But to dispute it correctly, the power of that evidence must first be firmly grasped. MacIntyre does not adequately explore the puzzles manifest in the particular virtues, and so he fails to do this.

THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF COURAGE

The most extended contemporary engagement with courage is the critique of traditional heroic courage advanced by some feminist thinkers.[16] Although this critique does not grapple with the phenomenon fully, it raises challenges that must be confronted by the serious student of courage. We therefore turn to it before briefly considering the neglect of courage by contemporary liberal theorists.

Before September 11, heroic courage had come under heavy fire—at least in theoretical circles. But it would be a mistake to think that this theoretical critique had no practical effect whatsoever. Had it had no effect on our civic life, there would have been no particular reassertion of respect for such courage in the aftermath of September 11, as was in fact hailed by articles declaring "G.I. Stands Tall Again (12 Inches)," and "Heavy Lifting Required: The Return of Manly Men."[17] These articles noted the renewed popularity not merely of war-related toys but also of "brawny, heroic, manly men" more generally. There would have been no reason to speak of "renewal" had we not been affected to some degree by a general sense that heroic courage and the qualities connected to it had not been prized by liberal citizens. While the feminist critique of traditional courage may not have been responsible for the decline in esteem that heroic courage and related qualities suffered, that critique remains important as the main—and most fully articulated—expression of contemporary doubts about courage.[18]

If those doubts have been silenced by the heightened regard for courage that we witnessed on and after September 11, this does not justify ignoring the feminist critique. If that critique is deficient, its deficiencies should be clearly identified, not pushed into the background along with the critique itself. Thinking about the feminist critique will help us think more clearly about courage, including its pernicious aspects. We must not overlook the courage—or "courage"—displayed by the terrorists, whose willingness to undertake their dangerous mission provides a chilling reminder of the destruction that courage can wreak. As we will see, the feminist critique forces us to confront these pernicious aspects of courage; in doing so, it helps crystallize the issues surrounding courage that deserve further examination. Most important, to the extent that recent events have instilled in us a renewed

sense of the importance of courage, the critique of it challenges us to consider whether there are grounds for defending courage other than its necessity.

The essence of the critique of heroic courage is that it and the admiration for it are in fact a manifestation of unhealthy longings. The following comment forcefully expresses the central reservation about traditional courage: "To many of us . . . courage as a virtue may seem but a tattered remnant of outdated ideals of chivalry—a macho-military quality that has outgrown its usefulness in civilized society. To some, courage is not a virtue but only an indelicate reminder of violence, war, domination, or other unpleasant conditions" (Walton 1986, 18).

As these remarks suggest, the critique of heroic courage is not limited to its extremes or perverted forms; it is a critique both of old-fashioned courage and of its attendant qualities, such as toughness, love of honor, single-minded devotion to a cause, and, especially, the willingness to sacrifice one's life for that cause. It is true that these critics do not deny the importance of some form of courage. What they wish to do is to separate their preferred model of courage from the traditional one. But how sharply can courage be separated from the qualities listed above? Can the critics' preferred model be severed from old-fashioned, heroic courage? Most important, have the critics who think so fully come to terms with the admiration most people have for this kind of courage?

Feminist political theorists, psychologists, sociologists, and students of gender have, as I have said, raised doubts about the high esteem in which citizens continue to hold heroic courage. Many argue that heroic courage is an ideal that breeds various kinds of violence—from aggression in the schoolyard to violence toward women and even murder. The critique focuses on the political and psychic effects of the qualities encompassed by heroic courage. Among contemporary educators, for example, it is a commonplace view that images of superheroes and macho toys encourage violent aggressiveness in young boys (Sommers 2000, 48, 84–86). Similarly, others focus on the way in which the military ideal is said to spill over into civilian life, particularly toward women.[19] By far the most common form of violence that admiration for heroic courage is said to breed, however, is war. Carol Gilligan has claimed that the model of manhood embodied by the military man enamors men of war and makes them eager to embrace it (1996, 251).

This does not necessarily mean that all men long for war; rather, a manly intoxication with war can infect and corrupt politics, even if the aim isn't warfare. Nancy Hartsock claims that intoxication with the ideals of manly courage is the reason that, for many men, "rather than war being politics by other means, political action . . . is simply war by other means" (1989, 147). Still, this "war by other

means" threatens to unleash war in the primary sense, for a leader's attraction to war can distort his—or her—view of the appropriate use of the military. In support of her claim, Hartsock cites Ernest Becker's exhortation that "our central calling, our main task on this planet is the heroic" and that "society as a whole should be understood as a vehicle for heroism" (146). Wendy Brown develops this argument further. Although she concedes that liberal regimes are generally less warlike than their predecessors, she maintains that they are still driven by a dangerously high regard for honor, glory, and heroism. She argues that such ideals distort the liberal state's priorities, for despite claims to the contrary, Brown maintains that "it is for 'national honor' that the state sacrifices its youth in foreign military interventions" (1988, 184). Conceding that "ours may not be a polity that cultivates the pursuit of heroic deeds and honor," she contends that "to the extent that public figures still invoke the language of heroism, it is usually to rationalize and glorify the sacrifice of life for empty causes, whether it be marines in Lebanon or schoolteachers hitched to the project of conquering yet another 'frontier'—the domain beyond planet Earth" (ibid.; see also Faludi 1999, 26–28).[20]

Most significantly, its critics contend, the appeal of heroic courage is rooted in a distortion of genuine human concerns, a distortion that has been fostered by certain male psychopathologies.[21] Many feminist critics of heroic courage take Simone de Beauvoir's account of men's pursuit of "transcendence" as the starting point for their analysis of why heroic courage is so attractive to men. In Beauvoir's portrait, men pursue transcendence because, free from the burdens of pregnancy and childbirth and thus the confines of the world of "natural functions," they seek "activity" or "creativity" in their lives (1989, 63–64). Ultimately, through the process of subduing nature, she argues, man encounters a realm beyond necessity, a realm in which he can satisfy his desire to affirm his *human* existence.[22] In that realm, man particularly finds dignity, that is, transcends his animal nature, through his encounters with danger. Discovering in himself a capacity to take on great risks, man finds proof that he cares for more than mere life, and he comes to see this as the sign of his superiority to all other beings (including woman), who seem to care only for survival and preservation. Building on Beauvoir's analysis of the attraction of transcendence to men, Brown maintains that heroic courage becomes the most important and attractive virtue for men because "the willingness to risk death is the proof that life has been discarded as a fundamental value. To be willing to *die* for something is considered more glorious than to be willing to *live* for something. . . . A real man lays his life on the line" (182; emphasis in original). Hartsock similarly maintains that men

believe that they become worthy of the title "hero" only if they are able to transcend their concern with mere life (1989, 137–44). As a result, she says, "heroic action must be disconnected from necessity, especially from concern with daily subsistence and thus from bodily, mortal existence" (144).

Although Beauvoir herself praises the manly pursuit of transcendence (see 1989, 65, 684, 719), most contemporary feminists are highly critical of it. The cornerstone of their critique is that men's pursuit of transcendence leads them to devalue all things associated with ordinary life, including the family and the provision of the basic necessities to everyone. According to Brown, men's attempts to distinguish themselves as human beings through displays of heroic courage inevitably make them *despise* the things connected with survival, which they have "ideologically and practically divided off from the activity of creating history and meaning" (1988, 192). Thus, the concerns that are ordinarily dear to women—preserving and nurturing life, treating others compassionately, resolving disputes without violence—necessarily appear weak and trivial; although they should be the concerns of all human beings, such concerns will be at best marginalized where heroic courage is prized (see Elshtain 1981, 346; Ruddick 1990, 232–34; Held 1993, 149–59).

There is certainly force to this critique. As some of these critics point out, it is men who have advanced the most fantastic and far-reaching projects for transforming human life; it is men who have often placed an ideal above concerns for the life and well-being of particular individuals. Jean Bethke Elshtain cites Plato's *Republic,* in which all other concerns are subordinated to the establishment of a fully just city, as an instance of such a blind fixation on noble ideals. The *Republic,* she says, "exemplifies a purely abstract vision of a future condition . . . [where] the traditional web of social ties and relations has been cast aside in order to serve a larger purpose" (1981, 39–40). Carol Gilligan argues that the Biblical story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac perfectly illustrates this kind of male extremism: only a man, she says, could have such "blind willingness to sacrifice people to the truth" (1982, 63). Others have noted that terrorism is an extremism to which largely men are drawn and that it is bred especially in societies in which "manhood is equated with violent conquest" (Morgan 1989, 51–84).

The problem is not merely that men's pursuit of transcendence or ideals harms others. Critics also claim that the detachment, harshness, and toughmindedness that such pursuits require distance men from themselves and their own humanity. Gilligan emphasizes that traditional models of heroic men encourage boys to "hide their humanity and sensitivity" and that, as a result, men are "psychologically and morally diminished" (1996, 251; see also Held 1993, 141;

Pollack 1998, 11–13). Susan Faludi attributes the "contemporary crisis of manhood" to the qualities that comprise traditional manliness, especially the "male paradigm of confrontation," which she claims has proved worthless to men and left them in the contemporary world with a gnawing sense of emptiness and purposelessness, without a clue as to what, beyond exerting their mastery, could constitute a happy, fulfilling life (1999, 14–30, 40–42, 604–5).

If critics of courage thus elucidate how destructive an infatuation with heroic courage can be, they aim to do more. Seeing heroic courage as irredeemably problematic, they seek to eliminate the admiration for it altogether. But their proposals for accomplishing this goal reveal the limitations of their critique. Sara Ruddick, for example, aims to turn men away from the transcendent to the immanent or natural world by making childbirth and -rearing the focus of both private and political life. According to her, motherhood (or the capacity for it) entails a way of thinking and acting that makes heroic action much less attractive to women because motherhood emphasizes life and therefore preserving rather than risking it. Ruddick therefore offers motherhood as a model for how to diminish men's reverence for courage. She argues that if men were to take an equal role in early child care, they would be fundamentally changed by the experience; they would develop the same priorities and concerns that women have. Men would come to appreciate better, and perhaps to prefer, living in this world to transcending it (1984, 186).

This argument for "mothering" places at the center of human life the acts of preserving the young and of fostering their physical, emotional, and intellectual growth (215; see also Held 1993, 159). But is this an adequate solution to the problems that the admiration for heroic courage inspires? Can concern for the young supplant the longing for a fulfilling life for oneself? On reflection, caring for the young cannot be an end in itself; the goal is not simply to enable today's young to care for tomorrow's but also to find and enjoy intrinsically joyful and satisfying activities. Can, moreover, a genuinely *human* happiness be found in the satisfaction of being "fed, held, warmed, and protected" (French 1985, 536, 541)? This vision does not seem to address fully the human longing to accomplish more in life than the satisfaction of our needs, to find some fulfilling activity; did not such a longing, after all, underlie at least in part feminist efforts to secure opportunities for women outside the home? For all her criticisms of the manly attraction to heroic courage, Brown, for one, balks at the notion that a satisfying human life can be found within the confines of motherhood. Mothering cannot satisfy the aching desire for a meaning in our mortal lives that is significant and lasting, for child-rearing affords insufficient scope for the full operation of our ca-

pacities (1988, 202).[23]

Even if men could be taught to "mother" in the same way as women, would this extinguish the admiration and respect that human beings have for those who display traditional heroic courage? It might be easy to dismiss the courage of an Achilles, who wildly hungers for a noble confrontation with death. But what about the courage of a Martin Luther King? In his famous 1968 speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," he said that he, just like anybody else, wanted to live a long life. But he continued: "Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will." He proceeded to say that although he suspected that he would not live to see "the promised land," he was "happy tonight" and "not fearing any man" (1986, 244).[24] These words suggest a commonality between his and the more extreme and problematic courage of Achilles; the example of King suggests that the dedication to a noble cause, even at the risk of one's life, is central to our admiration for courage. Consider also how citizens feel about veterans on Veterans Day or Memorial Day. Such sentiments indicate an underlying belief that heroic courage is still the core of courage because it is here that one consciously faces the greatest fear and risks the most.[25] The high praise for motherhood and other "natural," as opposed to transcendent, endeavors does not adequately account for the inherent respect human beings feel for those who are willing to risk their lives.

We can see how importantly heroic courage figures in the ordinary understanding of courage when we encounter an attempt to describe a courage purged of its heroic or traditional elements. What would a nonheroic courage look like? Brown argues that a "post-masculinist politics" must not deny a place for courage, which she maintains is "one of the most important and inspiring elements of human and political existence" (1988, 205). But she gives short shrift to what is ordinarily held to be "most important and inspiring" about courage; she never mentions those instances of courage where individuals risk their lives or why so many find such courage inspiring. Rather than explore these questions, she takes issue with what she calls the "traditional view," in which courage "has been the willingness to risk death for an abstract aim and the effort to defy mortality through placing the body in peril." Indeed, she maintains that in contrast to the kind of courage that she sketches, the "traditional formulation of courage as risking life can be seen as very crude and simplistic." But her sketch of a "post-masculinist courage" is quite vague; she says simply that such a courage "alters boundaries" and that it does so not by "simply smashing or denying them" but by setting "identity and security at risk in order to bring forth new possibility" (206).

According to Brown, a "post-masculinist courage" would be "the courage to sus-

tain life, to fight for freedom as bearers of life and hence of possibility" (ibid.). When Brown concludes her brief discussion of a "post-masculinist courage" by saying that human courage must lie in "distinctively human things—intellectual and emotional life, building collective existence, inventing new possibility, stretching horizons" (206–7), she may speak of a part of courage or something like courage. But she does not speak of the whole; she misconstrues the nature of courage by obscuring the fact that it inspires precisely because its exercise requires human beings to risk everything. The reason that Brown finds courage "inspiring" is that it reveals that an individual cares about something beyond his own life and well-being. But that human beings admire a life devoted to more than survival and well-being suggests that the traditional kind of courage has a more powerful and persistent allure than Brown and the other critics of heroic courage acknowledge. Brown thus depreciates that part of courage that involves a willingness or even desire to sacrifice and attributes it instead to a misdirected longing for something that "fully taps creative capacities . . . [and] our impulse to exert power and to distinguish ourselves" (205).[26] She criticizes not this longing and this impulse but rather the belief that acts of heroic courage can adequately satisfy them.

If Brown's account of the longings that inspire one to courageous action is correct, courage becomes a very dangerous phenomenon. Those who are seeking simply to fulfill a desire for creativity, power, and distinction might legitimately wonder why courage should be limited to a concern "to sustain life." Brown's account, however, like those of the other critics we have discussed, overlooks an important element in the reverence for traditional courage. However true it may be that human beings wish to be creative, to exert power, and to distinguish themselves, this wish seems to be governed by another, more crucial consideration—namely, by a concern for the *kind* of mark that the "creative" or "distinctive" individual leaves on the world (cf. 202); it is hardly insignificant whether one is remembered as a hero or a villain. Critics of heroic courage neglect a crucial and salutary aspect of the longing for transcendence, namely, the longing not for distinctiveness but for excellence. Those who aspire to heroic or noble deeds demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice their lives for a noble cause, not because to do so is a mark of creativity, power, or their distinctiveness from animals, but rather because it is the action of an excellent or noble soul. Indeed, the concern for the kind of mark one leaves behind is what makes the longing for transcendence in courage open to education. Whereas creativity, for example, is its own standard, the concern for excellence that is part of the wish to sacrifice for a noble cause is open to refinement; it is open to the question of whether what one takes to be excellence or a noble cause really is. And addressing this question can lead

to the revision of one's goals, that is, to education.

Downplaying or ignoring the aspiration to noble sacrifice, critics of heroic courage propose remedies for a condition that they have not adequately diagnosed, which hamstrings their efforts to restrain its excesses. More important, this misunderstanding prevents critics from exploring sufficiently the untutored human attitude toward courage and the tensions within it. Because they treat it from the outset as a sickness, they do not investigate its many facets. As a result, feminist critics miss the possibility that a dialectical investigation of courage and what kind of virtue it is cannot only uncover a healthy conception of a courage but can also shed greater light on a genuine human excellence.

COURAGE AND LIBERALISM

It may seem strange that feminist theorists are the contemporary figures who most seriously address the question of courage. Given the importance of courage to the preservation of liberal political life, we might expect to find sustained attention paid to it in the work of contemporary liberal theorists, particularly in the work of those who seek to clarify and elaborate liberal virtues. Curiously, courage does not play much of a role in their work. The relative neglect of courage is especially surprising because the very premise of the project undertaken by liberal theorists like William Galston and Stephen Macedo seems to demand an investigation of courage. For these theorists mount a defense of liberalism against those who claim either that liberalism has no substantive notion of human flourishing or that liberalism lacks the resources to produce the virtues that citizens must have for liberal institutions to survive, much less thrive. Since, as we have noted, courage seems both politically useful and an individual excellence, it is surprising that little is said about courage as a virtue in three prominent attempts to catalog and describe the liberal virtues (see, for example, Berkowitz 1999, xi; Macedo 1990, 129, 251; Spragens 1999, 229). Galston, for example, includes courage among the liberal virtues as a "means to the preservation of liberal societies and institutions" (1991, 220–21). But what disappoints anyone interested in liberal virtues is that Galston prompts crucial questions about the liberal incarnation of courage that he fails to explore. He begins his discussion of the liberal virtues by asserting that they "are not simply the classical virtues justified on a different basis. They are in important respects different virtues." But how, one may wonder, is this difference reflected in courage? Galston claims that "the liberal virtues demand less self-discipline and sacrifice than do the virtues of classical antiquity . . . [or] civic republicanism," but he also notes that not all socially

useful virtues (including liberal ones) are "individually advantageous" and that courage requires "the willingness to fight and even die on behalf of one's country" (220). Does it then turn out that liberalism needs some of the classical virtues? If so, how does a liberal polity foster such a virtues? Is courage, moreover, good only as a means to social ends, or is it also somehow good in itself? Galston does not address such questions.

It may be that courage is meant to be incorporated in other virtues that need courage to be properly executed, such as (per Spragens) "responsible self-reliance" and a "public-spirited willingness to participate in civil service" (1999, 229) and (per Macedo) "autonomy" and "active self-control" (1990, 216, 225 251). Such qualities do seem to require at least a certain toughness. The autonomous individual, for example, must be able to stand against public opinion. Is this toughness, however, courage? If so, courage of what sort? Is it a courage akin to old-fashioned heroic courage, or is it a different kind? Collapsing courage into other virtues leaves its true nature unexplored. Spragens's discussion of liberal public-spiritedness is instructive on this score. He explains what he means by "public-spirited willingness to participate in civic service": "Liberalism . . . does not expect its citizens to subordinate or sacrifice themselves to the larger society in the manner that the enthusiasts of republican virtue at times have done. . . . Civic liberalism does not ask too much. It asks only that liberal citizens be willing to do their part . . . that they understand that if they and their fellows are not willing to make some sacrifices and bend some efforts on behalf of the common good then it will not be achieved" (1999, 229).

The willingness to contribute one's fair share resembles justice, however, more than it does courage. Indeed, Spragens explains citizens' duty to bear the dangers of battle in terms of fairness: "if affluent," he says, "citizens should not insist that the children of the less well-off bear all the dangers of mutual defense." A citizen's duty, moreover, to "bear the dangers of mutual defense" is just one in a list of many duties that includes serving in the PTA, supporting public education, and coaching youth leagues (ibid.). By virtue of its inclusion in this list of civic duties, courage is eclipsed.

Similar questions arise from Macedo's treatment of the liberal virtues. Although he offers thoughtful and sustained treatments of the liberal versions of reasonableness (44), moderation (69–73), and justice (77ff.), he provides no similar treatment of courage. This is not to deny that he thinks courage must be of concern to liberals. In fact, he begins his defense of the liberal regime as worthy of respect precisely by highlighting courage. At the outset of his book, Macedo maintains that "free government needs its heroes, individuals prepared to make

great sacrifices on behalf of liberal values" (2). He then offers two inspirational examples of courageous individuals who were prepared to risk harm to uphold certain principles. But does his account of liberal virtue support such courage? By acknowledging that a "likely consequence of recognizing the plurality and conflict among ultimate values . . . is a detachment or moderation of commitment" (240) and even "a degree of alienation" (250), Macedo implicitly concedes that the successful cultivation of liberal virtues may tend to corrode courage.

By both recognizing the continuing need for courage and failing to treat courage explicitly as one of the liberal virtues, contemporary liberal theorists seem to have placed old-fashioned, traditional courage in a closet, trusting that it's there, ready to be hauled out in case of emergency, but otherwise neglecting it. The reason for this may well be because heroic courage fits uneasily with the theory underlying liberalism. Liberalism has always treated the cultivation of the virtues needed to sustain it with some ambivalence. As Peter Berkowitz notes, "For liberalism today, the care for virtue is both awkward and necessary."[27] This seems especially true of courage, because an education in courage may breed qualities, such as aggressiveness and inflexibility, that are inimical to the peacefulness and cooperativeness that are the hallmarks of liberal politics. In other words, there is a tension between the qualities that accompany heroic courage and those that the liberal ethic prizes. This tension has been recognized, to varying degrees, throughout the history of liberalism. While Adam Smith, for example, speaks admiringly of the heroic actions displayed by men, particularly in ancient times, who embody not only the "amiable and gentle virtues" but also the "awful and respectable" ones (Smith 1982, 23–25 [I.5.1, 5]; 152 [III.3.35]), he also indicates that the consequence of the liberal regime's greater security and humanity will be the demise of these harsher virtues and the ascendancy of a certain softness and even effeminacy (152–53 [III.3.36–37]; 190–191 [IV.2.10]). Similarly, although John Stuart Mill has respect for the "beauties and graces of the chivalrous character," he notes that where "the main occupation of society has changed from fighting to business, from military to industrial life," morality cannot be left to the requirements of chivalry. The beauty and grace of chivalry is therefore exchanged for securing more firmly "the rights of the weak and the general comfort of human life" (1988, 92–94). Kant's account of the liberal political sphere does not proclaim the demise of the "awful and respectable" virtues, but it does emphasize above all the need for citizens to be willing to cooperate with each other, to respect each others' rights, and to remain fundamentally committed to liberal institutions (see Kant 1991, 473–74, 477–84. See also the discussion at Shell 1990, 265).

In other words, the grease that turns liberalism's wheels seems to be, as Hobbes

indicated (1994, 95 [15.17]), a willingness to accommodate oneself to others, to meet them halfway. Insofar as the prime liberal concern is to foster the cooperative spirit that enables citizens to enjoy their personal lives in peace, it is not hard to see that the virtues that incline us to harmony are more important than a virtue like courage.[28] While partisans of liberal politics praise courage as valuable in private affairs, their commitments make them wary of its public expression.[29] Such partisans may reasonably think that the cultivation or promotion of patriotic courage threatens internal peace.[30]

The notion that individuals who prize courage are at odds with a regime whose public sphere looks above all to securing the private sphere has a distinguished ancestry. Hobbes and Locke recognized that individuals who are enamored of courage and who therefore long for battle as the opportunity to display it pose serious threats to security, material prosperity, and freedom.[31] Indeed, they strive to keep such men in check—if not to eliminate them altogether—by reorienting their goals. Accordingly, Hobbes and Locke do not speak of war as the sphere of courage, nor do they characterize, as Aristotle does, individuals who exemplify courage as those who choose noble deeds in war even though they may suffer pain. Hobbes instead maligns the spirited love of honor that inspires courageous acts; he dismisses it as "vainglory," one that leads men to undertake violence "for trifles" (1994, 76 [13.7]). For his part, Locke speaks highly of courage, calling it the "guard and support of the other virtues," but the courage he emphasizes is that displayed not on the battlefield but rather wherever men face "pain, disgrace, and poverty" (1996, 86 [§ 115]). While Locke may be aware of the attraction that noble deeds hold for men, he seems to think that it can be effectively muted if men's energies are channeled toward commerce and industry. Once so immersed, men will be too preoccupied to care about the fame that comes from noble actions on the battlefield.[32] A liberal citizen's courage, we see, must be moderate in character—a sort of resolve, it is hoped, that can confront evils when they arise but that does not wish for the opportunities they provide.[33]

There is also a more troubling tension between courage and the strand of liberal theory that has its roots in Hobbes. If we ask, Why one should one be willing to sacrifice one's life in the service of one's country? then ancient political theory can reply—though hardly without prompting further questions—that this willingness is noble. This answer, however, is difficult for a thinker such as Hobbes, who claims that political life aims at ensuring security and material prosperity for citizens rather than at enabling them to accomplish noble deeds. If these are the chief political ends, then how can our question be answered? It makes no sense to die for the sake of one's life. It may be true, as Rousseau puts

it, that those who will the end will the means—in other words, that those who wish to preserve their lives in a civil society must willingly contribute to its defense (1978, 64 [II.5]). But especially where individuals have not undergone the rigorous civic education that Rousseau favors as the means of forging a community whose members are wholeheartedly devoted to it, what arguments can explain to each individual why he himself rather than his neighbor should leap to his country's defense?

A particularly vivid illustration of this difficulty can been seen in Hobbes's discussion of those who are drafted into military service (1994, 142–43 [21.15–16]). The sovereign political authority, Hobbes argues, has the right to demand military service from a citizen and "to punish his refusal with death," for otherwise the commonwealth would collapse. Hobbes adds that a draftee may substitute "a sufficient soldier in his place," thereby indicating that what matters is that the commonwealth be defended, not that one defend it oneself; money (to hire substitutes) can take the place of courage. He then offers what it is tempting to call an excuse for those whose fears lead them to flee from battle, for he says that "to avoid battle is not injustice, but cowardice." But according to Hobbesian theory, a coward does not, strictly speaking, need an excuse. To excuse someone is to cite some reason not to blame him, but in light of the primacy that Hobbes accords to life, how can human beings be blamed for treating their lives as primary in the first place? Indeed, insofar as fleeing from battle can preserve one's life, it is questionable to what degree cowardice can, on Hobbes's principles, be deemed a defect of character. The concern for life that occupies the center of Hobbes's political theory makes it hard to treat the courage to risk one's life as a virtue toward which everyone should strive.

How much this line of thinking has seeped into liberal souls remains unclear. On the one hand, courage is at times linked to the promotion of one's own good; a recent bestseller, for example, exhorted its readers to have *The Courage to be Rich*.[34] This use of courage is consistent with what Tocqueville noted is Americans' tendency to insist that "doing good is to [their] private advantage" (1969, 525). On the other hand, as we noted earlier, liberal citizens not only are willing to risk their lives for their country but are also powerfully moved by examples of traditional courage. Indeed, noting that Americans, like others, are sometimes "carried away by the disinterested, spontaneous impulses natural to man," Tocqueville maintains that Americans "do themselves less than justice" in explaining away all their selfless acts as rooted in enlightened self-interest (526). But this tension in the liberal mind reflects a tension in liberal thought: both the need and the persistent respect for courage are at odds with the liberal hope to subdue those qualities associated with

heroic courage that threaten domestic peace, stability, and concord. As a result of this tension within liberal political thought, the default position with respect to courage is usually to downplay or even ignore it. To grasp the meaning and importance of courage, we must look elsewhere.[35]

APPROACHING PLATO

Plato's *Laches* and *Republic* are our best guides for this purpose. Although courage is a theme in many of Plato's dialogues, it receives a thematic treatment above all in these two texts.[36] In the *Laches,* Socrates investigates courage together with two Athenian generals. This conversation among leading individuals in Athens over the proper education for young men takes place during approximately the ninth year of the Peloponnesian War. On turning to courage as an example of the kind of excellence young men need, Socrates and the two generals investigate what exactly makes courage a virtue. They approach this question by inquiring first into the basis for the nobility of courage, asking whether courage lies in the risk ventured or in the good that it yields. The *Laches* thus tackles this crucial question about courage: can it be separated from a moral purpose? Moreover, since the interlocutors agree that the courageous man is noble and therefore no fool, they and the reader are also led to consider both the role that wisdom plays in courage and the role that courage plays in wisdom. But the connection between wisdom and courage raises further questions that the *Laches* does not address: If wisdom is necessary for courage, can only a philosopher be truly courageous? Does a philosopher need courage at all, and if so, does the kind of courage needed for intellectual pursuits have anything in common with the courage exercised in battle?

Socrates' treatment of courage in the *Republic* helps us address such questions since it fleshes out and supplements our understanding of the issues raised in the *Laches*. But precisely how the *Republic* resolves these questions about courage is by no means clear. Socrates focuses attention on the psychological quality that he there contends underlies courage—*thumos,* or spiritedness—and considers the ways in which the people might be educated so as to cultivate the most fitting forms of courage. A courageous nature is the first requirement for the guardians of the famous city in a speech that Socrates constructs with his young interlocutors, and the successful cultivation of the guardians' courage is crucial to the philosophic openness of their city. But the connection Socrates draws between spiritedness and courage also suggests that there is something irrational about courage, particularly in the heroic form that most excites the imagination of cer-

tain of Socrates' interlocutors. If courage has a strong irrational component, then how can it be properly educated? Socrates also treats courage as essential to a philosophic soul, and he devotes considerable thought to the ways in which education can cultivate courage so as to render the soul as good as possible. Because of their sustained investigations of both the nobility of courage and the connection between courage and wisdom, the *Laches* and the *Republic* together provide the most fertile ground for a study of courage in Plato.[37]

Most traditional Plato scholarship, however, does not treat these two dialogues as complementary in this way. Many commentators have treated the *Laches* as relevant largely for bringing out a defect in the historical Socrates' understanding of courage, and the *Republic* for remedying that defect. The reason for this position lies at least in part in the genuine differences between the discussions of courage in the two dialogues. The *Laches* is famous as an "aporetic" dialogue—that is, a dialogue in which the interlocutors fail to arrive at an answer to the question being addressed.[38] The lack of a definition of courage in the *Laches* may suggest that the Socrates of that dialogue is ignorant of one. By contrast, the Socrates of the *Republic* explicitly defines courage, or at least a certain kind of courage, and discusses its natural foundation at length. A "developmentalist" reading of these differences explains them as evidence that the dialogues should be classified as either "Socratic" or "Platonic": in the former, Plato describes the radically skeptical views of the historical Socrates; the latter are those that reveal the philosophical system by means of which Plato distinguishes his thought from that of his teacher.[39] This developmentalist view is the main challenge to the interpretation offered in this book insofar as it implicitly denies that the two presentations of courage together yield a single understanding of courage.

Recently, however, there has been a growing consensus among Plato scholars that this developmentalist classification of the dialogues must be rejected. The root of this consensus lies in another, eminently reasonable consensus emerging among Plato scholars—namely, that the essential beginning point for any attempt to grasp Plato's thought is the basic fact that Plato wrote dramas or dialogues and not philosophical treatises.[40] From this fact, Plato scholars are now concluding that the developmentalist account is untenable.[41] First, the evidence for such an account is illusory because the reasoning supporting this account is circular: differences between various texts are assumed to stem from shifts over time in Plato's thought, and this assumption is then used to chart the order in which Plato wrote his dialogues (resulting in their famous classification into "early," "middle," and "late" dialogues). This developmental assumption, for which there is no internal textual support, is then employed as a crucial inter-

pretive tool.[42] As John Cooper, the editor of the most recent English edition of Plato's works, has said, to follow this line is "to announce in advance the results of a certain interpretation of the dialogues and to canonize that interpretation under the guise of a presumably objective order of composition—when in fact no such order *is* objectively known" (1997, xiv, emphasis in the original).[43]

The developmentalist line of interpretation simply slights the dialogues' form. Since the dialogues are dramas, it makes sense to approach them as dramas, to use dramatic clues in order to ascertain the dialogues' meaning. Indeed, treating the dialogues first and foremost as dramas eliminates the need to resort to developmentalism to account for differences in the dialogues.[44] At the very least, such an approach forces one to grapple seriously with *all* the evidence in a dialogue that can shed light on its teaching. Trying to establish when Plato thought what he did is simply putting the cart before the horse.

But if, as I have argued, it is important to read Plato's dialogues as dramas, one may reasonably ask whether the present focus on the theme of courage in two different dialogues risks obscuring or distorting Plato's thought. Can one properly understand the arguments about courage in the *Republic,* for example, if one separates them from the rest of the *Republic,* which is after all explicitly about justice? This is a difficulty that we must keep in mind. To guard against the potential distortions caused by focusing on a single theme, the present study adheres closely to the text and attends carefully to the variety of human types with whom Socrates speaks and the circumstances governing his interactions with them. In reading the dialogues, one has to consider whether Socrates is expressing what he truly thinks or whether he is speaking in order to cause certain effects in his interlocutors. The serious reader must thus attend closely to the dramatic interplay between characters and arguments, including—perhaps especially—the flawed arguments made by Socrates, for when Socrates makes bad arguments, their very inadequacy may be designed to teach us something. Indeed, the reader must seek to understand why an argument is bad, who might be its intended target, and what reaction or response that bad argument might be trying to elicit. Approaching Plato's texts in this way guards against the potential distortions caused by focusing on a subordinate theme in a dialogue, such as courage in the *Republic,* by helping to ensure that in interpreting the dialogue we are uncovering *Plato's* understanding rather than simply imposing our own on his texts.[45]

Most important, approaching Plato's dialogues in this way allows the reader the possibility of gaining the kind of education that Plato's Socrates describes so beautifully as a "turning around of the soul" (*Republic* 518c–d). Socrates' meta-

phor suggests that education does not produce something new in the soul; rather, it consists in properly positioning or "turning around" the soul so that it can see clearly what it already in some way grasps. This is to say that education, according to Socrates, is less about learning new things than about learning to understand old, familiar phenomena clearly, which in part—perhaps in considerable part—means grasping the obstacles to understanding them clearly. Plato's dialogues provide an excellent way of beginning this kind of education.[46] As we have suggested, by using the dialogue form, Plato does not present a clear teaching with which one simply agrees or disagrees (see also Plato, *Seventh Letter* 341e3). Instead, the dialogues force us to reason for ourselves about the issues they involve. Analyzing the dramatic as well as the logical evidence the dialogues contain, we consider matters from the perspectives of all the characters in the dialogues and seek not only to distinguish sound arguments from bad ones but also to understand why bad arguments are attractive not only to the particular characters who embrace them but also to us.

We turn to the *Laches* to begin our investigation of courage because Socrates there begins his inquiry from the simplest, most naïve question: What is courage? Moreover, Socrates' main interlocutors here are well positioned to raise the basic questions about courage. Laches and Nicias are two well-known generals who have real, practical experience of courage—or at least something like it. As we will see, each general offers conflicting definitions of courage, some aspects of which are familiar while others defy common sense. Before we examine each of their conversations with Socrates in extensive detail, we will begin by examining the context in which the dialogue occurs, namely, a discussion about the proper education for young men. Since the context of the conversation sheds important light on what is at stake in a conversation about courage, it ultimately helps to clarify why an account of courage that is both coherent and satisfying is so difficult to find.

CHAPTER ONE

Courage and the Education in Virtue

TWO NOTIONS OF COURAGE

Plato's *Laches,* which is subtitled, "On Courage," is his most explicit treatment of courage.[1] In the dialogue, two highly esteemed Athenian generals, Laches and Nicias, offer different definitions of courage. Both men would seem to be experts on the subject. At the time when the action of the dialogue occurs, Nicias is not only a leading Athenian general but perhaps the most powerful man in Athens; he either is about to conclude or has recently concluded a peace treaty with Sparta, albeit a short-lived one, ten years into the Peloponnesian War.[2] Laches, Nicias' fellow general, has by the time of the dialogue ably led the Athenians in several battles (see Thucydides III.90, 99, 103), and he was Nicias' chief colleague in the negotiations with Sparta leading up to the peace (see Thucydides V.43).[3]

Their common experience as prominent generals, however, does not lead Laches and Nicias to agree about the meaning of courage. Laches claims that courage is "steadfastness of soul" (192b9), whereas Nicias defines it as "knowledge of the terrible and emboldening things" (195a1).[4] It is not only the case, however, that they disagree about courage with each other. Each general in fact turns out to disagree with himself as well; in seeking to defend his initial claims, each winds up contradicting his own account of courage. By bringing to light each man's inner conflict, Socrates fleshes out the grave tensions at the heart of the ordinary understanding of courage, thereby at the very least preparing the way for efforts to resolve them.

The conflict over courage between Laches and Nicias—and within each of them—turns in large part on their different views of what makes courage a virtue. Although these are the opinions of only two individuals, they stand for much more than the peculiarities of these two men. In their very extremity, Laches' and Nicias' respective opinions about courage reveal *the* fundamental tensions in our ordinary conception of courage. Laches is most impressed by the courageous man's capacity to endure pains and fears: an essential toughness or steadfastness is the core of the virtue, according to him. The initial and not wholly misleading impression Laches gives is of a general analogous to George S. Patton. While Laches is a less complicated and forceful figure than Patton, he possesses the kind of admiration for unvarnished guts for which Patton is well known.[5] Socrates' questions to Laches, however, reveal an extreme and troubling position buried in Laches' view. Socrates eventually gets Laches to agree that the more ignorant or foolish the steadfastness, the more courageous it is. Laches is frustrated by this conclusion but does not see how to avoid it.

Nicias, by contrast, takes up what is in effect the opposite opinion. Latching on to what he considers the Socratic view of virtue—that it is knowledge (194d)—Nicias argues that the courageous man is distinguished by his prudence. Nicias' character is thus closer to a Colin Powell, who as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff devised a test for the use of military force that limits military engagement to those situations in which an overwhelming force can achieve a quick and decisive victory with minimal casualties.[6] While such a test might be said to reduce the need for courage by reducing the dangers that soldiers would have to face, Nicias' concern with prudence is so extreme that he seems to want to eliminate the need for courage altogether. Indeed, when pressed by Socrates, he reveals that he thinks the courageous man is so distinguished by his prudence that he possesses complete knowledge of good and evil and can invariably attain the former and avoid the latter. Like Laches, though, Nicias turns out to be uncomfortable with the extreme version of his view of courage that Socrates compels him to articulate. Nicias draws up short, we shall see, when he realizes that complete knowledge of good and evil is the whole of virtue rather than a part of it; unable to imagine that human beings can possess the complete virtue entailed by his understanding of courage, he is at a loss to explain how they can possess *any* courage. The chief aim of our inquiry into the *Laches* will be to understand why Socrates' two main interlocutors find attractive, but cannot defend, the rival theses that courage is, on the one hand, wholly devoid of prudence or, on the other hand, wholly determined by it.

The fact that the two generals' disagreement over courage ends in a stalemate, with neither able to offer a coherent account of courage, has led a number of commentators to conclude that the *Laches* is of little philosophic interest.[7] Other commentators disagree, arguing that while the dialogue does not offer a settled definition of courage, the dialogue still does yield a definition that incorporates aspects of both Laches' and Nicias' definitions. This second group argues that, according to the dialogue, courage means steadfastness in the face of fearful or dangerous circumstances, steadfastness that requires knowledge of the circumstances that demand steadfastness and of the particular actions that particular circumstances demand. The *Laches,* then, does seem to offer a coherent definition of courage: "wise perseverance."[8]

While this surely seems a sensible definition of courage, its clarity is deceptive. Indeed, by failing to unpack the phrase "wise perseverance," the scholars who offer it as the definition to which the *Laches* points wind up undermining, if unwittingly, the philosophic interest of the dialogue more than those who treat the dialogue as aporetic. One reason for doubting the sufficiency of this definition is a simple question: if courage is simply wise perseverance, why does not Socrates suggest this? A more compelling reason for doubt, as well as the likely answer to the question just raised, is the fact that this definition, however sensible, obscures the most interesting and urgent questions regarding courage. The difficulty with simply putting the pieces of the *Laches* together as though they were parts of a puzzle is that it flattens the dialogue, it suppresses what is at stake in the generals' opinions about courage. To speak of "wise perseverance," for example, is to leave open the *character* of the wisdom involved, which is thus to obscure the central issue dividing Laches from Nicias (and, in a way, each from himself): the degree to which courage must involve prudence if it is to be a virtue, that is, something admirable or choiceworthy.

Laches' discomfort with the notion that courage is foolish steadfastness does indicate that he thinks courage is admirable only when its exercise is governed by some knowledge or wisdom. But what is the knowledge that makes courage admirable? Laches proves unable to identify the content of a knowledge that, on the one hand, saves courage from being foolish but that, on the other hand, does not undermine its nobility. As for Nicias, he forthrightly associates courage with the prudent pursuit of one's own good, but he ultimately balks, as we said, at the implications of this association; eventually he realizes that his view is incompatible with the inability of human beings to grasp the knowledge that Socrates shows him would, according to his argument, constitute the complete virtue that Nicias believes is necessary for courage.

What is it about the view of courage as a virtue that makes it so difficult for Laches and Nicias to settle on the role of wisdom, or prudence, in virtue? On the one hand, virtue seems to be a quality that contributes to or constitutes a human being's own flourishing. On the other hand, that we speak of virtue as noble implies that it is more than a mere aid to our own interests. We speak of virtue as something noble because we think of it as splendid, as transcending concern with our own well-being. If we know that, say, jumping out of a burning house is the only way to escape immolation, doing so may be sensible and even impressive, but is it noble? It is only by addressing such questions, which the *Laches* powerfully raises, that we can find the genuine philosophic interest of the dialogue. Our task in this and the next two chapters will be to explore the different notions of courage expressed in Laches' and Nicias' definitions in order to clarify the obstacles that prevent the generals from arriving at a coherent notion of courage.

A PATERNAL PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION

Although we are most interested in what the *Laches* can teach us about courage, it is not immediately obvious that the dialogue concerns this subject; indeed, the sections in which Socrates examines Laches and Nicias about courage do not begin until the dialogue is half over. The *Laches* in fact has a broader theme: education or, more precisely, the education of the young in virtue.[9] What happens in the course of its action is that Socrates, who is at this time relatively unknown (see 180e–81a and 189b1), makes at least one of his interlocutors—Lysimachus—believe that he, Socrates, is an expert in this field (see 201c). Socrates, amazingly, even instills the belief that he knows more about courage than two esteemed generals, whose accounts of courage he refutes without—equally amazingly—incurring their hostility.

In the opening scene of the *Laches,* two fathers, Lysimachus and Melesias, invite Laches and Nicias to consult with them about whether a new kind of spear-fighting (*hoplomachia*), akin to fencing, is an appropriate study for their young sons (Aristeides and Thucydides, respectively).[10] The four men have just finished watching a demonstration of the new art (179e). The fathers' interest in the new spear-fighting reflects a deeper concern that their sons—"the greatest of our things" (187d)—become not just skilled but also virtuous men. They are investigating this new practice, Lysimachus says, because unlike "the many" who allow their children simply to live as they wish, they seek a practice that will help their sons "become best." They are soliciting advice from the generals, he continues,

because the latter have sons of their own about whose education they must be similarly concerned. If, Lysimachus delicately adds, the generals have not yet thought enough about educating their sons, they ought to join him and Melesias in a common quest for the right education (179a–b; cf. 187d). Although the specific topic of the first part of the *Laches* is *hoplomachia,* then, the deeper theme is the education of young men in virtue.

Lysimachus' concern for education denotes a certain seriousness about virtue, but that seriousness is limited. He asks whether the new kind of fighting will inculcate virtue; he does not ask what the virtue is that should be inculcated. This larger question is not at issue because, while Lysimachus and Melesias are serious enough about education to want the best for their sons, they are confident that they know the purpose of education; they believe that they know what the virtue of a man is. This becomes clear when Lysimachus explains to the generals that he and Melesias hold up their own illustrious fathers as models for their sons to emulate. Now their fathers, who are the boys' namesakes—the famous Aristeides and Thucydides—were not praiseworthy in all respects, he explains.[11] In particular, Lysimachus blames them for neglecting his own education and that of and Melesias. Lysimachus considers this neglect a leading reason why both he and Melesias, unlike their fathers, lack noble deeds of their own to recount. Their deficiencies as educators notwithstanding, Aristeides and Thucydides were great political men who, Lysimachus says, managed very successfully "the affairs both of the allies and of this city." They earned the fame that he and Melesias, to their great shame, lack (179c–d). For Lysimachus, virtue thus seems to mean acting nobly in the city and winning fame for one's actions; someone whose noble actions enable him to live on in the city's memory is a good man, even if he shows neither the concern nor the ability to educate others in virtue. It is the capacity to perform laudable noble deeds that Lysimachus and Melesias wish their sons to learn, and it is thus understandable that they would seek guidance from the two famous generals.[12] That the generals have sons the same age as Lysimachus' and Melesias' sons may give them an interest in discussing education; but it is the generals' skills and virtues that seem to make them appropriate advisors on the subject.

But why, we may ask, have the fathers now become so interested in their sons' education and in spear-fighting as a pedagogic device? The reason may be that they perceive their sons to be indifferent to virtue as they understand it. For, it appears, the young Aristeides and Thucydides have been present at conversations with one "Socrates," whom they "frequently mention" and "praise vehemently" (180e). This seems to worry the fathers. We learn this when Laches, begging off

Lysimachus' request for assistance, expresses amazement that the fathers have chosen to consult him and Nicias about educating their sons rather than Socrates, who seems to know something about teaching virtue to young men. Socrates, according to Laches, "is always spending his time wherever there is any noble study or practice of the kind you are seeking for the youths" (180b–c).

Now, Lysimachus knows at least a little bit about Socrates. When Laches directs Lysimachus' attention to Socrates, Lysimachus, having known Socrates' father, addresses him as "child of Sophroniscus" (180d–e). He appears, however, not to have imagined that the Socrates the young Aristeides and Thucydides now so admire and the one standing before him, whose father he knew, are one and the same. Had he known this, he would certainly not have sought Socrates' advice. On the contrary, Lysimachus appears worried about the influence of "Socrates" on his and Melesias' sons. When the boys, in their one sentence in the dialogue, confirm that the son of Sophroniscus is indeed the Socrates whom they have been praising, Lysimachus swears by Hera and congratulates Socrates for honoring the memory of his father, "the best of men" (181a). While Lysimachus' words praise Socrates, this does not mean that he has a high opinion of what the boys are learning from the person he now knows is the son of his old friend. Despite his flattering words, Lysimachus does not invite Socrates to join the discussion about *hoplomachia*. Rather, he expresses the tepid, albeit friendly, hope that he and Socrates might share things in common (181a). Not until Laches insists that Lysimachus not "let the man go" and praises Socrates for honoring not only his father but his fatherland at the battle of Delium (181a–b) does Lysimachus solicit Socrates' opinion about *hoplomachia*. His hesitation leaves the unmistakable impression that he still harbors doubts about what the boys are learning from Socrates.

What might the character of those doubts be? Manliness is, as we have seen, prominent in Lysimachus' mind. Indeed, the oath he makes to Hera when he praises Socrates underscores its prominence, for women rather than men usually swear by goddesses.[13] Lysimachus' invocation of the goddess Hera seems to be a not-too-subtle attack on Socrates' manliness, but his use of this oath may also reveal the extent to which he sees his own lack of noble deeds as a sign of unmanliness.[14] His own unmanliness may be particularly on his mind at this moment, when he meets the man whom he learns has contributed to the boys' flirtation with (as he sees it) unmanly pursuits. Indeed, it may be precisely the boys' involvement with Socrates that has roused the fathers' interest in their sons' education. They know the Socrates whom their sons admire not as a man of noble deeds but rather as one who spends his time conversing with young men and

teaching them to converse with each other. Insofar as Socrates prefers speaking to acting, he is neither a good example nor a good teacher of Greek manliness. The fathers may be concerned that their sons are acting more like women than the action-oriented men they want them to be. As we have indicated, the hallmark of a real man and the full expression of his virtue, according to Lysimachus and Melesias, is not engaging in long, private conversations but acting well and performing noble deeds, as their fathers did. The boys' infatuation with Socrates and their imitation of his activity may well be why the fathers have latched onto *hoplomachia* as potentially able to instill manly virtue in their sons.

That Lysimachus is worried about Socrates' influence on the boys is confirmed by his reaction after Laches, urging him again to consult Socrates rather than himself and Nicias, notes that he saw Socrates act courageously in the battle at Delium. Upon learning this, Lysimachus "rejoices" with apparent relief to hear that Socrates "enjoys a good reputation." That he reacts so strongly and that only then does he invite Socrates to join the common inquiry into spear-fighting underline how lukewarm his initial praise was. Having first thought of Socrates as a mere talker, he thinks much more highly of him after the lavish praise that Laches bestows on him. Socrates, Laches claims, displayed such steadfastness when the two of them withdrew together in the Athenian flight at Delium that had the other Athenian soldiers behaved as he did, the city would have been saved (181b).[15] Socrates' laudable military experience seems to qualify him in Lysimachus' mind as a worthy consultant about educating young men in virtue.

The sequence of events leading up to Socrates' invitation to join the conversation shows that Lysimachus, Laches, and Nicias all agree that only men who have performed noble, manly deeds can advise well on noble, manly pursuits. That Laches and Lysimachus believe this is clear from their agreement that Socrates' battlefield courage counts as a pedagogic credential. Nicias' similar regard for the importance of deeds appears from the fact that he agrees to "become a partner" in the inquiry into spear-fighting before Laches speaks up about Socrates; it doesn't occur to him to consult Socrates (180a). More tellingly, Nicias fails to suggest this despite his intimate knowledge of Socrates' involvement with the question of education; not only, we learn, has Socrates recommended a music teacher for Nicias' son (180d), but Nicias himself has also engaged in long, extended conversations with Socrates about how to live nobly (187e–88b). Nicias thus does not appear to have considered Socrates, whatever his virtues, qualified to give advice about manly pursuits like spear-fighting. Socrates' skill at dialectical exchange seems, then, not to figure in any of his interlocutors' minds as an independent qualification for participation in the conversation. This is perfectly

understandable in light of the apparent initial agreement among the fathers and the generals that virtue means accomplishing noble actions for the city.

We have just seen that Socrates' interlocutors outflank him on one side in their regard for action. They also seem, perhaps paradoxically, to outflank him on the other side in their regard for education. Neither Laches nor Nicias challenges Lysimachus' apparent certainty that virtue, including courage, can be learned through a "study" or "practice" of some kind (179d7, 180a4). This belief may not seem remarkable. Were there nothing to be said for it, the claim of institutions like West Point to teach courage as well as strategy would ring false. Lysimachus, however, may think that virtue is teachable more because he has great hopes than because he has real evidence to support his belief. We should not forget that he thinks that he and Melesias failed to accomplish noble deeds because their fathers, too busy with affairs of state, neglected to provide for their education. If virtue can or, rather, must be learned, then Lysimachus and Melesias are absolved of responsibility for their unremarkable lives. If, moreover, virtue depends only on the right education, then with sufficient and well-informed effort on their part, Lysimachus and Melesias can ensure success and fame for their sons—and paternal pride for themselves. The combination of an excuse for their own situation and the prospective enjoyment of their sons' success may render beyond question Lysimachus' belief that virtue can be taught.

But to what degree can virtue be taught? In another context, as we shall shortly see, Socrates quietly suggests that this is a murky question. There are sensible reasons to doubt that virtue is teachable. If virtue depends on education, whether an education will "take" may depend on an individual's nature or "raw material." Excellence in gymnastics, for example, requires natural flexibility; excellence in geometry, good spatial reasoning. Even, moreover, where the aptitude is present, any individual's ultimate success at any study seems to depend on more than just the ability to receive instruction. When, for example, Lysimachus and Melesias warn their sons that if they fail to look after themselves and obey their fathers, they will be without fame (179d), the fathers point to the natural drive that is required for success: the sons must want fame enough to heed their fathers' advice. Even, then, if there is a study that can teach young men the virtue they need in order to accomplish noble deeds, they still need at least the drive to undertake and make progress in that study.[16]

Lysimachus does not seem to have wrestled with the possible limits of education; as we have suggested, he may not wish to recognize any. If so, this would hardly be surprising. Lysimachus would merely be displaying an all-too-human wish to think that the qualities he most esteems are not beyond his or his son's

natural capacities. If Lysimachus' belief that virtue is teachable consoles him for his own lack of virtue and fills him with hopes for his son, this may explain why Socrates broaches only delicately the possible limits of education. Socrates mentions these possible limits when, to his suggestion that the men examine how courage can be cultivated in young men, he adds the qualification, "*to the extent* that it can be present from practices and studies" (190e, emphasis added; cf. 189e–90b). Socrates does not pointedly raise the question of the teachability of virtue in this dialogue, though it remains an underlying theme.

Tact, however, may not fully account for Socrates' behavior here. Although a general reluctance to upset fathers who wish to educate their sons could suffice to explain his delicacy, so could an agenda of his own. Socrates, after all, has been conversing with Aristeides and Thucydides; he may well wish to continue doing so, and upsetting the boys' fathers would surely impede the satisfaction of this wish. By the end of the dialogue, as we have observed, Socrates has grown so much in Lysimachus' estimation that Lysimachus views him as an expert on education in virtue. In effect, the man whom Lysimachus initially suspects of corrupting the young (by feminizing them) gives himself an image makeover, one that alleviates fathers' concerns about his influence on their sons.

That Socrates may use the dialogue to improve his reputation does not mean that he fails to raise troubling questions about virtue and about courage in particular. He could hardly induce belief in his expertise without at least identifying complexities in virtue and in courage. He does not, we shall soon see, have to force that expertise on his interlocutors by offering his own views. Rather, because Laches and Nicias disagree about spear-fighting, Socrates gets an opportunity to play the arbiter. In this role, he draws out the tensions in their accounts, and he shows that he understands a thing or two about virtue and even that he understands courage better than the generals. In this demonstration, Socrates proceeds with great care. Not only might he wish to avoid upsetting the fathers of boys in whose company he has shown some interest. He is also surely concerned to avoid offending powerful generals, whose opinions of him will carry weight not just with Lysimachus and Melesias but with all of Athens.

THE BENEFITS OF SPEAR-FIGHTING

After learning from Laches of Socrates' bravery and thus of his credentials for teaching young men to accomplish noble deeds, Lysimachus asks Socrates for his opinion on the innovative kind of spear-fighting. Socrates, however, proposes that the two generals offer their opinions first, adding that if he then has anything

else to say, he will in turn "teach and persuade" them all (181d). Whatever other reasons Socrates might have for holding back, it might have appeared presumptuous of him to preempt the generals' own statements about spear-fighting. The generals' ensuing speeches reveal different evaluations of the new art and, more importantly, a profound disagreement over the nature and purpose of virtue: is virtue a capacity to secure some further good or is it simply good in itself, that is, something whose goodness consists in its exercise? This disagreement enables Socrates to steer the conversation toward an investigation of how one ought to understand the virtue whose intrinsic goodness may in some cases be hardest to see: courage.

Having deferred to the generals' expertise, Socrates directs Nicias to speak first (181d7). Nicias rises ably to Socrates' challenge. We meet a sensible, prudent warrior who, although he is unfamiliar with *hoplomachia,* extemporaneously offers seven plausible benefits that one might obtain from studying it.[17] He thus appears to have deliberated before, if not about this particular study, about what constitutes a good education. It may well be the case that Socrates turns to Nicias first—with whom, as we noted, he has associated in the past (see 188a–b)—because he thinks that Nicias will have something useful, perhaps even controversial, to say about the study.

The first few benefits that Nicias attributes to the new form of spear-fighting are rather mundane. *Hoplomachia* is useful, he claims, first for keeping young men busy and second for improving their physical condition. The third benefit appears to be of a higher order. Like gymnastics and horsemanship, he claims, this new kind of spear-fighting is a practice befitting a "free man" (*eleutheros,* 182a1). The free man, according to Nicias, is well trained in "the tools of war"; he is thus prepared "for that contest in which we are competitors and in those things for which the contest lies ahead for us" (182a). Exactly what Nicias means by a free man and the contest for which *hoplomachia* prepares him remains unclear. Insofar as the contests to which Nicias refers are contests other than war, such as the gentlemanly sport of horsemanship, Nicias may mean to praise *hoplomachia* as part of what constitutes a free man's leisure. But Nicias' emphasis on the importance of the free man's training "in the tools of war" and on his preparation for "the contest that lies ahead" suggests instead that he praises *hoplomachia* more straightforwardly: for helping a man to prepare for war. While a free man (in ancient Greece) may have leisure for many activities, Nicias is very much aware of the central role that battle plays in his life.

The fourth and central benefit that Nicias attributes to spear-fighting continues Nicias' emphasis on its usefulness for war. Nicias first claims that the study

"will be of some benefit even in the battle itself, when one must fight in the ranks with many others" (182a). In fact, however, the study's usefulness when one is fighting in the ranks is highly questionable. First, there would be no room in the hoplite formation to engage in the feints and withdrawals that are part of fencing and that this study apparently teaches; even the front-rank fighters would have great difficulty in practicing the required maneuvers, which require taking a pace back. Second, to maneuver as a spear-fighter would be strategically unsound; in addition to the mass of troops pushing at the backs of front-rank fighters in hoplite warfare, spear-fighting in battle would risk opening up gaps in battle lines and thereby exposing the inferior ranks both to charges from opposing hoplites and to missiles or javelins from the auxiliary light-armed troops known as peltasts.[18]

That Nicias is aware of the problem with claiming that *hoplomachia* is useful in war becomes clear when he immediately adds that the "greatest benefit" the study provides in war is the skill to fight one-on-one, after the ranks break (182a). It is at this point that a hoplite faces the gravest danger to himself in battle, since he then no longer has the defensive support of his comrades. Nicias claims that once a soldier is left to fight one-on-one, knowing the art of *hoplomachia* improves both his capacity to pursue and attack an enemy and his capacity to execute a safe retreat (182b3; cf. 188a5). It is not difficult to see, however, that the alleged offensive advantages of this study are doubtful. Even if the study could make men more capable of pursuit and attack, the capacity to pursue and attack the enemy one-on-one simply would be of little use in hoplite warfare (see Thucydides IV.126.4–5) With their heavy armor and shields, hoplites were ill-equipped for pursuit. Ranks broke because one side could no longer withstand the force of the opposing formation moving against it; the losing ranks were the ones that broke. For their part, the victors would hesitate to break ranks, as doing so could expose them to a counterattack.[19] A hoplite who left the ranks in hot pursuit of the enemy might even be reprimanded by his general (see Herodotus 9.71). The new technique of spear-fighting would, therefore, be most useful for defense rather than offense, when a hoplite has lost the defensive shield of the phalanx (see Thucydides IV.96.3).

That a primarily defensive skill impresses Nicias as the study's "greatest benefit" certainly indicates that he is very much alive to matters of safety.[20] But Nicias himself does not emphasize the study's defensive role. Rather, he adds that one "who knows this would not suffer anything from one man nor perhaps from several, but in this way would gain the advantage *everywhere*" (182b, emphasis added). Spear-fighting, according to Nicias, thus both keeps a man safe *and* en-

ables him to accomplish all his objectives. It is presumably because it does both that Nicias calls the study noble. That he thinks it is noble becomes clear when he says it will inspire everyone who learns it with the desire for "other noble studies," in particular for those associated with generalship (182b–c). Nicias assumes that "everyone" who learns spear-fighting, every foot soldier, will desire to acquire the knowledge that comprises generalship; he may assume that "everyone" regards such knowledge not only as useful but as noble, just as he does (182b). The degree to which a foot soldier, though, would consider strategic mastery noble, in contrast to confronting the enemy head-on, may be questioned. The same cannot be said for Nicias, whose very high admiration for strategic knowledge and for the ability to direct successful charges and safe retreats is clear from his praise of *hoplomachia*.[21]

In Nicias' final arguments in support of studying *hoplomachia,* we learn that the knowledge that enables one both to attack and retreat well, when confronting the enemy on one's own, is not merely the key to success but the foundation of courage itself. Nicias now claims that "this knowledge (*episteme*) would make every man in war not a little bolder and more courageous than himself" (182c). Because it teaches men what to do when the ranks break, Nicias suggests that the study will give them confidence that they can survive that perilous moment, thereby increasing their bravery in battle. In other words, Nicias implicitly questions whether innate courage can be sufficient for what men must face on the battlefield. He doubts that anything but knowledge that substantially increases one's chance of success can give one the necessary courage to confront the terrors there. Even such knowledge may not suffice; Nicias adds that the knowledge of the study will make a man "appear more graceful" and thus "more terrible to his enemies" (182c–d). Even if the study does not instill sufficient knowledge to overcome one's fear, it can at least make one *look* terrifying to the enemy, enabling one to fool his enemies into thinking he is more menacing that he is.

Nicias' disquisition on the new style of fighting indicates why he is sympathetic to it. Nicias thinks that the core of a free man's life involves participating in the great contest that is war, but he is painfully aware of the risk this life entails, recognizing that courage can exact a high price (recall Aristotle, *NE* 1117b5–15). While he may not shrink from this risk, he is pleased to find—and take advantage of—anything that minimizes it. He has high hopes for knowledge, believing that it can replace what nature does not provide. Indeed, he may feel himself naturally deficient with respect to courage.[22] Nicias seems defensive as he concludes his praise of the study; he points out that the benefit of appearing courageous must not be considered "dishonorable" (182c–d). Nicias feels the

need to justify his praise of the ability to *appear* courageous even if one is not, as though the benefits of projecting such an appearance are not sufficient justification. Is Nicias uncomfortable with his prudent concern to minimize the risks that the warrior must take on the battlefield? To find out the answer to this, we need to see what emerges from Socrates' examination of Nicias' definition of courage, which, as we have indicated, will explicitly identify courage not with a particular study but with a certain kind of knowledge.

At the conclusion of his praise of *hoplomachia,* Nicias urbanely announces that "if Laches says something besides these things, I would hear him with pleasure" (182d). Perhaps he does not suspect that his colleague will disagree with him—but Laches takes him by surprise. Whereas Nicias praised the new spear-fighting above all for supplying knowledge needed in warfare, Laches treats it very suspiciously; as we will see, he doubts that the study can inculcate real virtue or, more precisely, real courage. Laches evaluates the study primarily on the basis of the regard paid to it by the exemplars of excellence in warfare and courage, namely, the Spartans.[23] Unlike the teachers of the new kind of *hoplomachia,* who may, Laches says, be "deceivers" (182e5), the Spartans are "the most serious of the Greeks about such things" (183a); it is well known that they do everything they can to excel in war. They do not, however, practice this kind of spear-fighting. For Laches, this fact alone is enough to convince him that it is not a genuine skill. It is possible, Laches acknowledges, that the Spartans might simply be unaware of the new practice, but even if this is the case, it does not affect his opinion of spear-fighting. For, he says, if the teachers of the new study believed that their practice contributed to excellence in war, then surely they would take it to Sparta, where it would be especially valued if it were genuine. That they instead treat Sparta as "inaccessible sacred ground" (183b) constitutes strong evidence for Laches that they and their studies are fraudulent.

Laches thus purports to use the mere fact that the teachers of the new study do not approach Sparta as proof not only that it is useless but also that its teachers know it is. That he appeals to an authority to discredit the new technique, however, indicates that he does not himself know it to be useless. Indeed, how could he? Surely it is at least possible that this new art of spear-fighting enhances self-defense, as Nicias asserts, when the ranks break. Surely it is also possible that those who teach this art steer clear of Sparta not because they fear being unmasked as frauds but because they are aware of the Spartans' famous conservatism, that is, resistance to change. We soon learn, it is true, that Laches has independent evidence of deficiencies in the teachers of spear-fighting; he previously witnessed the teacher whom they have all just seen demonstrating the

skill, a certain Stesilaus, make a fool of himself using this technique (183d–84a). But that a practice reveals a fool to be a fool is still not grounds for dismissing it altogether. Given the limits of the criticisms that Laches levels at spear-fighting, we may doubt that his contempt for it really stems from open-minded skepticism about its military utility. We may wonder, that is, whether Laches' efforts to discredit it have another source. Perhaps his expressed doubts about the usefulness of spear-fighting are in fact a stalking-horse for deeper concerns of which he may not be fully aware.

We may approach these by asking why Laches is so confident that the Spartans would reject spear-fighting were the art's practitioners to attempt to export it there. After all, if he does not himself know that the study is useless and if his claim about why its teachers avoid Sparta is less than compelling, how can he be sure that the Spartans, who are interested in anything that will help them "gain the advantage over others in war" (183a2), would not welcome whatever military advantages spear-fighting might give them? Perhaps Laches thinks that the Spartans would reject it not because it is useless but because of the particular way in which it might be useful. Laches may suspect what Nicias' defense of the study suggests: it teaches a skill useful mostly for individual self-defense. Teaching it may well encourage each soldier to focus on his own individual safety.[24] This would greatly undermine the Spartan virtue that Laches so admires and the exercise of which hardly puts a premium on an individual's safety. The virtue for which they were famed was arguably most on display during the Persian Wars at the battle of Thermopylae, where three hundred Spartans, fully aware that their actions would cost them their lives, stood their ground against a vastly superior Persian army so as to buy time for the cities to the south to prepare to fight the massive Persian force.[25] If Thermopylae teaches us anything about the Spartans, it shows their great capacity to rise in moments of crisis above concerns for individual safety.

Spear-fighting, then, may repel Laches because it undermines "Spartan" virtue precisely if Nicias is right about its contributions to self-defense. More simply, it may repel him because it appeals to and indulges cowards. When Laches describes the display that he witnessed Stesilaus, the instructor of the new technique, perform on a previous occasion, he describes Stesilaus as having used "a sickle-spear" (*dorudrepanon,* 183e1–2), that is, a long spear crowned by a curved blade.[26] On that occasion Stesilaus appeared to be a ridiculous coward. While he was engaged in fighting with his "sickle-spear" aboard a ship, it became entangled in the lines of the opposing ship, which dragged him down the length of his own. His ridiculous plight caused a great deal of laughter from friend and foe alike. Worse, as soon as someone threw a stone at his feet, Stesilaus dropped his

spear in apparent cowardice (183e–84b). Moreover, if his "sickle-spear" performance is any indication, Stesilaus' new techniques are not well designed for warfare, much less the hoplite kind. A "sickle-spear" that would most likely be used to tear the opposing ship's masts by cutting its rigging would be useless in war, since Greek fleets did not sail into battle with their masts standing.[27] Laches may suspect that if such skills are not useful in war, they are pursued only by frivolous and cowardly men. If Stesilaus represents for Laches the sort of man who employs *hoplomachia,* its practitioners must strike him as exceedingly base in comparison to the Spartans and their amazing toughness (cf. Plato, *Laws* 633a–c; Adcock 1957, 8–10). In the contempt he expresses for spear-fighting, Laches seems to be defending good old-fashioned virtue against newfangled learning. For Laches, the former, cultivated as in Sparta through years of habituation, greatly surpasses the latter, which teaches men innovative techniques and strategies but does not reach the crucial thing: their souls.

Indeed, Nicias' praise of *hoplomachia* for enabling men to appear courageous when they are not cannot but strengthen Laches' reservations about it. Not only can it, by Nicias' admission, mask cowardice, but precisely insofar as it enables these individuals to intimidate others and thus to get by despite their deficiencies, it lulls them into thinking that they do not need the genuine virtue. They therefore remain vulnerable to the consequences of their deficiencies, such as Stesilaus' dropping his weapon in fright. *Hoplomachia* can therefore be indicted for being not merely useless but also corrupting.

It turns out, though, that according to Laches, even genuinely courageous men could suffer, at least in reputation, for knowing the art. For those reputed to know *hoplomachia* attract especially great scrutiny from others, who are eager to detect signs of cowardice in them. Laches seems particularly concerned about the possibility of being revealed as a fraud. Virtue, for him, is not merely something useful in a particular situation; it is a sign that one is a real man. But courage, he implies, is a virtue whose exercise can be so difficult that only one who has virtue "to an amazing degree" could know *hoplomachia* and escape becoming ridiculous in the overly watchful eyes of others (184b–c). We must wonder what he thinks it means to possess virtue to an amazing degree. If the knowledge of *hoplomachia* does not contribute to its possession, does some other form of knowledge?

SOCRATES' RHETORICAL STRATEGY

Laches' and Nicias' conflicting assessments of *hoplomachia,* with one praising it for contributing to safety and the other condemning it as a refuge for cowards,

points to an implicit dispute in their views of courage. They are not yet alive to this dispute, however. It is Socrates who awakens them to it. Upon entering the conversation, though, Socrates does not initiate a debate about courage. Instead, he initiates a discussion on the difficulty of finding experts to educate the young.

That Socrates does not immediately press the most serious question raised by Laches' and Nicias' speeches is surprising, however, in light of the self-portrait he gives in the *Apology*. The *Laches* is, in fact, one of the few Platonic dialogues that depicts Socrates as doing what he claims in the *Apology* he often did: converse with leading Athenian statesmen, examining their opinions about noble and good things (*Apology*, 21b–d). But his behavior here does not strictly conform to that account. In the *Apology,* Socrates presents himself as investigating what the statesmen think is "noble and good" (21d5), ultimately incurring their hatred by showing them that they are not as wise as they think. Here, though, Socrates proceeds delicately. He does not enter the conversation until he is invited to do so, and when he does enter it, he displays great finesse in questioning the generals about virtue. Indeed, as we noted, he manages to refute their accounts without incurring their hostility and without upsetting the fathers' deeply held conviction that virtue is teachable.

Socrates' performance in the dialogue appears all the more impressive when one considers its subject matter and context. The initial inquiry into the suitability of using spear-fighting to teach virtue yields to an inquiry into courage, the virtue most prominent in the discussion about spear-fighting. Not only does Socrates manage, without giving offense, to bring out deficiencies in the generals' views of courage, about whose meaning they have a professional interest, but he does this in the middle of the Peloponnesian War, when the whole city of Athens may be presumed to have a great deal at stake in the status of courage. When citizens are fighting and dying on the city's behalf, it is perhaps not the easiest time to raise questions about their courage and, implicitly, about whether the city, as represented by two leading generals, has good grounds for honoring them.

We should not forget that Socrates faces certain personal risks in this conversation. If he is not careful, he could undermine, especially by raising questions about courage, the good reputation he obtained as a result of the brave actions at Delium for which Lysimachus has just congratulated him. The opinions that Lysimachus and the other interlocutors have of him, as we suggested, may be of some consequence to Socrates. At the time of the dialogue, Socrates is about forty-five years old and thus in the prime of his life. Plato's dialogues indicate that Socrates' pursuit of philosophy very much involves vigorous conversations with

young friends. Thus wishing access to the young, he would not want to hinder it by incurring the animosity of civic leaders in the way that he claims he does in the *Apology*. Lysimachus' and Melesias' sons, we have seen, already know and have spoken with or at least listened to Socrates. As we learn from other dialogues, Aristeides and Thucydides go on to study with Socrates (see *Theages* 130a–e), and Aristeides makes impressive progress for a while (see *Theaetetus* 151a). These future developments would be imperiled were Socrates to do anything here to incur the bad opinion of the boys' fathers or of the generals whom the fathers so admire. His tactful conduct in the *Laches* helps to protect his ability to converse with the young men of Athens.

At any rate, after hearing Laches and Nicias quarrel about the worth of *hoplomachia,* Lysimachus asks Socrates to "cast his vote" with one of the generals (184d6). Having deferred to the generals when Lysimachus first solicited his opinion about spear-fighting, Socrates this time objects to Lysimachus' request. Lysimachus merely wants Socrates to side with either Laches or Nicias, as though a majority vote would suffice to determine the merits of spear-fighting. Socrates responds to his request in a way that suggests that Lysimachus is not thoughtful enough about what a good education is. Turning to Melesias, Socrates gains the latter's agreement that, precisely because education is so important, the fathers cannot let numbers decide the issue.[28] Knowledge is what counts, Socrates says, reminding the fathers that "their greatest possessions" (185a6) are at stake.

The question, however, is who has the knowledge they require. Thinking that all they need to know now is the educational value of *hoplomachia,* Lysimachus and Melesias surely think that they have come to the right people: who better to consult about this art than accomplished generals like Nicias and Laches? The exchange between the two generals, though, has revealed a difficulty in the fathers' plan: what are they to do when the purported experts disagree? Can they be confident, moreover, that the generals are expert in the right field? It is this last question that Socrates forces upon them as he assumes direction of the dialogue. The men cannot assess the value of spear-fighting until they determine the end to which it might be a means.

This requires them first to find an expert in education, someone who knows what the finished product of a proper education looks like. When the conversation turns to this topic, Socrates may benefit in two ways. First, when his interlocutors see how seriously Socrates takes education and virtue, they may excuse him for raising difficulties with their own notions. Second, by exhorting the fathers to take the inquiry into the proper ends of education with the utmost seriousness and by turning the conversation to the question of who the true experts

in education are, Socrates encourages the fathers to begin considering the possibility that Socrates himself is the best educator for their sons.

The real issue, Socrates persuades them, is not spear-fighting *per se* but the condition of their sons' souls (185e). He persuades by means of a series of analogies. Socrates compares the inquiry into spear-fighting to inquiries into the proper drug for healing eyes and into whether a bridle should be used on a horse (185d). Just as when, in the case of deliberations about the drug or the bridle, one is really deliberating about what is best for the eye and the horse, so in examining spear-fighting one is examining what is best for young men. Socrates' analogies raise questions about the nature and purpose of education. If education is like a drug that restores sight to an eye, it restores health to the soul, enabling it to flourish. But if education is like putting a bridle on a horse, it curbs natural inclinations and freedom so as to make one useful to others (190a; cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1106b15–25). It is, of course, possible that both kinds of education are desirable. But which should be primary? Which should fathers be most concerned to give their sons?

Through another analogy Socrates raises a further question about education, one that we have already broached: how much can education do for a soul? Socrates suggests that, in order to determine whether any of them are experts in teaching virtue, they follow the same procedure they would follow in order to determine who is expert in athletics (185b). This analogy raises an obvious difficulty: the athletic trainer is limited by the natural talent of his charge. The best he can do for an individual is bring him to the best condition of which he is capable; no trainer can supply exceptional athletic talent. Insofar as this is a relevant analogy for education, it implies that a soul's excellence is limited by its natural composition. A soul may need to be naturally robust in order to reap the full benefits of education.

However this may be, Socrates says that anyone who would give Lysimachus and Melesias the advice they seek should show that he has expertise in teaching virtue. In light of the fact that Nicias and Laches have just offered advice, this is a not-so-subtle challenge to them. Making the requisite demonstration means showing that one has been either a good student or a good teacher. Either one must identify the expert, "manifestly good" teachers from whom one has learned how to teach virtue; or, because Laches objects that not all experts have teachers, one must identify the students whom one has oneself made good (185e–86b). This demand that would-be advisors show their credentials seems reasonable enough, but in fact it is a formidable challenge. In the first place, to require that one identify one's expert teacher in order to prove one's own expertise requires

showing that one's teacher had an expert teacher and so on *ad infinitum*. If, however, the generals cannot do that, which presumably they cannot, they must identify someone who has "by general agreement" become good through associating with them. This task requires not only that the generals identify such a man, but that there is in fact general agreement about what constitutes being good, that is, virtue. But what exactly constitutes virtue is by no means clearly accepted by "general agreement." Indeed, that the nature of virtue is controversial quickly becomes evident in the conversation about courage that ensues, if it has not already.[29]

As for himself, Socrates denies that he can meet either standard for determining an expert. First, his poverty, he claims, prevents him from hiring the sophists who profess to be able to make him "noble and good," and second, he has not been able to acquire "the art" of teaching others himself.[30] He therefore encourages Lysimachus to question Laches and Nicias to see whether or not they have the requisite expertise, restating the ways in which the generals can prove their capacities. Apparently sensing his own deficiencies, Lysimachus asks Socrates to examine the generals in his stead; from Socrates' claim that he does not know how to teach virtue, Lysimachus has not concluded that Socrates is unable to examine others' teaching abilities (cf. 189c–d).

Lysimachus has clearly changed his views as a result of this discussion about expertise. Whereas before he took for granted Laches' and Nicias' expertise, he now wants them to demonstrate proof of it, saying that it would please him and Melesias if they would be willing to do what Socrates has asked (187c). His respect for the generals has diminished; he is unsure of their expertise. This is evident as well from his restatement of the reason why he and Melesias have sought the generals' advice about spear-fighting. Whereas he earlier said that they have done so because they believed the generals were "capable of knowing" such things and because the generals had sons about the same age as theirs, now Lysimachus mentions only the latter reason (187c5–6; cf. 178b3–4, 179a8–b1). At the same time, he has become more impressed with Socrates, whom he now has enlisted as his agent for finding an expert. Socrates has moved from the periphery of the dialogue to its helm.

Nicias readily agrees to the conversation. But he suspects that it will in fact focus on the generals themselves rather than on their teaching credentials (187e–88b). Based on his prior experience of conversations with Socrates, he knows that Socrates will question anyone with whom he speaks until his interlocutor "falls into giving an account of himself, the way he now lives, and the way he has lived his past life." Since in Nicias' mind, however, "it is no bad thing to

be reminded of what we have done or are doing that is not noble," he agrees to "pass time with Socrates however he wishes." Laches joins Nicias in consenting to Lysimachus' request, but on the basis of his familiarity with Socrates' deeds rather than with his speeches (189a). Indeed, Laches is wary of anyone who speaks about "virtue or some wisdom" if he is not "truly a man and worthy of the speeches that he is uttering" (189c6–d2). Laches is certain that Socrates' speeches will be acceptable because, he says, Socrates' action on the battlefield sufficiently proved his virtue and thus his worthiness to speak about it. Whereas Socrates' prior speeches lead Nicias to consent to be "tested" by him, Socrates' prior deeds are what make Laches eager to take part in the examination.[31]

Nicias' suspicion that Socrates will turn the conversation around to an investigation of the generals themselves (189b) is soon confirmed. Once the generals agree to have their teaching credentials examined, Lysimachus asks Socrates to examine the generals for him. But Socrates immediately changes the question from whether Laches and Nicias are qualified teachers to another line of inquiry, namely, how virtue improves the soul. Socrates claims that this new line of inquiry would "lead to the same thing and begin somewhat more from the beginning" (189e). It is not difficult to see why this new line of inquiry is "more from the beginning"; in order to be able to teach virtue, one must know what it is. Thus, in undertaking this inquiry, Socrates addresses precisely the most crucial and primary question. But how this new inquiry "leads to the same thing" is less obvious. That one knows what virtue is does not necessarily mean that this knowledge can be taught to others; Socrates at least leaves this question open (see 189e6–7). Still, that Socrates says that this new line of inquiry will "lead to the same thing" as examining Laches' and Nicias' teachers and students suggests that the examinations that follow are not in fact a shift away from the problem of teaching virtue but somehow an investigation of it.

Rather than focus on virtue in general, however, Socrates proposes that they limit their inquiry to the part of virtue that spear-fighting aims to cultivate, which is "presumably" courage (190d3–5). In context, his proposal is an offer the generals cannot refuse. Lysimachus and Melesias have appealed to them out of concern for their sons; they have already offered some advice, which the dialogue to this point has made clear they could not have responsibly done if they thought they lacked expertise. How can they refuse Lysimachus' plea that they help him further by submitting to Socrates' questions? Because the plea issues from Lysimachus, the generals will be less likely to blame Socrates if, as in fact happens, they prove not to have expert knowledge of courage; after all, he is only doing Lysimachus' bidding (see 189d5).

Nicias at least is not eager to be examined by Socrates. He rather unenthusiastically describes submitting to Socrates' questions as "no bad thing"; he speaks of himself as having "suffered" Socrates' examinations, to which he submits because one "must not flee these things" (188a). Ultimately he explains his heeding Lysimachus' request by saying that "nothing prevents" him from passing time with Socrates "however [Socrates] wishes" (188c). Laches is more eager to converse with Socrates, encouraging Socrates to say "whatever is dear to him" (189b7) without taking account of their different ages. But he has no experience of Socrates' conversations.

What appears to be a long introduction to the discussion of courage thus not only hints at many of the complexities surrounding courage but also demonstrates Socrates' artfulness. Contrary to his self-portrait in the *Apology,* Socrates can press the most serious questions about virtue with important statesmen without incurring their hatred. Indeed, his examination of their views can even improve his prospects for talking to young men; here Socrates shows the fathers that he is at least more qualified than the leading statesmen of Athens regarding virtue. Moreover, having secured the fathers' request to direct the dialogue, Socrates is largely absolved of responsibility for whatever troubling revelations emerge in the course of their dialogue, above all the revelation that neither general can give a coherent account of what courage is.

CHAPTER TWO

Noble Courage

Socrates and Laches

LACHES

A fundamental question: why this particular title? That the dialogue bears the name of Laches (and not, say, Nicias) suggests that understanding him and his opinion of courage is somehow integral to understanding the dialogue. We have seen that Laches cares a great deal about courage. He is willing to be examined by Socrates on the subject because he has witnessed Socrates' valor on the battlefield. Indeed, not only does Laches defer to Socrates when asked about what constitutes a noble study or practice (180c; see also 181a–b, 184c), he even maintains that he submits to Socrates' scrutiny "with great pleasure" (189a).

Despite his stated willingness to have Socrates teach and refute him (189b), Laches does not seem to think that he has much to learn from Socrates. From the outset, he appears confident that he sufficiently understands virtue in general and courage in particular. More precisely, if he does not think he understands these subjects perfectly, he thinks he understands them enough not to shy away from Socrates' implied challenge, which is made possible by Laches' argument that spear-fighting is not worth learning because, not only does it not cultivate virtue, it even corrupts it. As we have noted, he cannot responsibly make this argument unless he has at least a solid grasp of what virtue is. So when Socrates asks him how "we" can counsel anyone about virtue "if we did not at all know even what virtue happens to be" (190b–c), he is not merely identifying the conditions the generals must meet if they are to be deemed worthy to dispense advice—he is also implying that Laches must either understand virtue or admit that

he has behaved shamefully. Whether or not this consideration affects Laches' response, he emphatically agrees with Socrates that "we" know what virtue is (190c).[1] Socrates, however, does not ask him about virtue *per se*; it would be a lot of work to "examine the whole of virtue straightaway" (190c). Rather, he says that they should more modestly focus on a part of virtue, the part that "the many" think "learning about armor" is really about: courage (190d). Confident that he understands courage, Laches swears "by Zeus" that courage is "not hard to state" (190e4). His swearing underlines both how much he cares about courage and how certain he is of its meaning.[2]

His certainty is shattered when Socrates reveals the deep confusion in his view of courage. Indeed, the dialogue may be named after him because of the character of this confusion. Laches takes to an extreme the position of those who most esteem courage, those who believe, as he does, that courage is not only noble but also "among the noblest things" (192c). The problem with this position is that it turns out to be very hard for Laches to reconcile his admiration for courage as surpassingly noble with the view that it is also a means to some further good. Laches initially accepts the view that courage accompanied by prudence is "noble and good" (192c8–9). On its face, this claim is unremarkable; it merely implies that courage is most a virtue when one accomplishes through its exercise something good for oneself, for others, or for both.

But as the conversation proceeds, Laches retreats from this view. When Socrates indicates the skillfulness with which the prudently courageous man behaves, Laches begins to think less well of prudent courage. He winds up arguing that what is truly admirable is not prudent but foolish courage, that is, the courage of the man who lacks both knowledge and skill. As Laches listens to Socrates' examples of prudent courage, he reveals that he in fact thinks that the nobility of courage is independent of its goal. But Laches never quite renounces his initial agreement with Socrates that courage accompanied by prudence is noble and good. He is torn between the two perspectives. His confusion represents a quintessentially human confusion, the exploration of which will illuminate the reasons why we are uncertain about the essence of courage.

STANDING ONE'S GROUND

Laches' confident first attempt to define courage seems promising: if someone were "willing to remain in the ranks and defend himself [*amunesthai*] against the enemies and should not flee," he would, according to Laches, be courageous (190e). It is hardly surprising that Laches defines courage in terms of battle; not

only is he a general, but the battlefield also seems to be the greatest test of courage, since one faces the most terrible dangers there.[3] Or, perhaps we should say, it is the greatest test of courage for anyone who considers courage to be "among the noblest" things, for unlike those who behave bravely when disasters befall them, those who confront dangers in battle seem to choose to face them voluntarily.

Socrates, however, is dissatisfied with Laches' definition and blames himself for its insufficiency. He claims that Laches has "spoken well" but adds politely that because he, Socrates, has failed to "speak distinctly" in his question, Laches has not fully addressed it. To clarify Laches' meaning, Socrates asks him if he means to say that the man who "remains in the ranks and *fights* (*macheitai*) the enemies" is courageous (191a2–3, emphasis added). Laches agrees that this is his meaning without seeming to notice that Socrates has changed the focus from defending oneself against enemies to fighting them. That Laches does not object to—or, perhaps, even notice—Socrates' revision of his definition shows that he does not think that self-defense lies at the heart of courage, his initial words notwithstanding. The common element in Laches' initial and in Socrates' revised definition is "remaining in the ranks": the essence of courage for Laches is standing firm, whether on defense or offense.

But there is another wrinkle in Socrates' switched focus. Laches' initial definition did not indicate a purpose for remaining in the ranks. A man can "remain in the ranks" and "not flee" in two very different situations. One can do so by holding fast in formation and absorbing an enemy onslaught either until one exhausts or defeats the enemy or, should the enemy prove stronger, until one dies.[4] But one also remains in the ranks and does not flee when one executes a calm and orderly retreat. Indeed, not only does one defend oneself better in this way than through holding one's ground until death, but one also lives to fight another day.[5] If Laches' ready—or perhaps unwitting—acceptance of a switch from defense to offense indicates that standing firm is the essence of courage for him, it leaves unclear which for him better exemplifies courage: standing firm no matter what or acting coolly with a view to victory in battle.

One might think that the latter consideration should be more important for a general like Laches. After all, fighting the enemy is clearly part of civic courage; it is the duty of a good citizen to fight enemies when necessary. Indeed, from the civic perspective, courage cannot be properly understood as a virtue without reference to its civic purpose. It is noteworthy, then, that Socrates rather than Laches first speaks of fighting the enemy; it is peculiar that a general like Laches defines courage as remaining in the ranks and defending oneself rather than in

a more civic-spirited way as fighting the enemy. That he chooses the former rather than the latter formulation reinforces what had come up in his critique of the new art of *hoplomachia*: in his heart, Laches does not understand courage primarily as a means to accomplishing some other task, even victory. Thus, it appears even more strongly that for Laches, the act of standing firm constitutes the essence of courage.

To put it somewhat differently, what counts for Laches seems to be the "moment of truth," the moment when one could run away but instead stands firm and faces one's fears. His definition raises the possibility, which subsequent developments will confirm, that for him courage is in a certain sense an end in itself. This means that courage is prized and admired not because it facilitates success at other tasks but rather because it is good in itself. That is, courage is somehow intrinsically satisfying for Laches whether or not it yields any further benefit, like dancing or health. Standing one's ground in the moment of truth is attractive to Laches as a virtue that is good in this sense.[6] But this view, as we will see, is problematic as well. To argue that remaining in the ranks is an end in itself means that the virtue of courage can come into its own only in the midst of dire circumstances; insofar as courage is "among the noblest" things, such a view implies that only at the worst of times do we become our best selves.

The foregoing analysis rests on what emerges after Socrates asks his next question. Having gained Laches' agreement that the courageous man remains in the ranks and fights his enemies, Socrates wonders about the man who fights the enemies while "fleeing" (*pheugon*). Socrates' reformulation of Laches' original definition has thus introduced a crucially important addition; Laches' reaction will reveal how much he really thinks that courage is an end in itself. For the extent to which he agrees that fleeing can count as courageous is the extent to which he concedes that courage cannot simply be an end in itself but must be guided by a higher purpose. Not surprisingly, Laches is very puzzled by Socrates' suggestion that one could fight the enemy while fleeing (191a), for this suggestion implies that fleeing the enemy can be courageous. Nothing could be further from Laches' apparent view that courage is holding one's position at the moment of truth. In support of his contention, Socrates cites the Scythian horsemen, whose battle strategy includes intervals of both pursuit and flight. He also cites Homer's praise for the Trojan Aeneas' horses, who "knew how to pursue and to flee," and for Aeneas himself, who, according to Socrates, Homer called a "counselor of flight" (191b1).[7] Laches concedes that some may engage in this flight-and-fight response, but he denies that "the heavy-armed soldiery of the Greeks" (191b) fight in this way. Laches has to grant that flight can sometimes be strategic, but

he seems not to hold those who carry out this strategy in high esteem. He is quite certain that flight is not part of the tactics of the masters of hoplite warfare, the Spartans, whom we know he greatly admires. It is one thing, Laches seems to think, if cavalries and charioteers do not stand their ground, especially if they are barbarians like the Scythians or the Trojans; what else can one expect from men who need assistance from horses and chariots (cf. Thucydides IV. 126–27)? The situation is very different for those among the Greeks who have the courage to put on heavy arms and fight man-to-man: they do not flee.

The problem with this position is that, according to Socrates, it is wrong. In fact, Socrates points out to Laches that at Plataea, the Spartans "were not willing to remain in the ranks and fight" against their enemies, the Persians; rather, they "fled" only to turn around later to fight and win when the Persian ranks were broken (191c).[8] Laches agrees tepidly; he acknowledges that "what you say is true" (191c6). It is not clear what Laches' response means. On the one hand, Laches could be merely admitting that the Spartans did flee at Plataea, not that they acted courageously in doing so. Or he could be admitting the latter as well. Indeed, insofar as he takes the Spartans as his model of courage, he may find it very difficult to deny that they behaved in a model fashion at Plataea, especially because of the magnitude of their victory there.

But Socrates' own interpretation of the Spartans' action as "fleeing" (*pheugein*) at Plataea, with all its cowardly connotations,[9] is problematic, which further obscures the full meaning of Laches' agreement.[10] First, the Spartans did not simply "flee" the battle; under pressure from the Persian cavalry, they retreated to a new, unpolluted water source—their previous one had been ruined by the Persians—from which they could replenish their dwindling provisions (Herodotus IX 49–53). Second, not only was their "flight" not a flight, but their retreat was, contrary to Socrates' presentation, not purely for tactical purposes. According to other accounts of the battle, only after the Spartans were pursued by the Persians did they turn around to fight. Herodotus' and Plutarch's accounts of the battle suggest that the retreat at Sparta was not part of a sound strategic plan; according to them, the Spartans turned around to fight only after sustaining many casualties as they hunkered down and waited for the omens to prove favorable to them.[11] Why, we are thus led to wonder, does Socrates present the Spartans both as "fleeing" the battle and as having used the appearance of flight as part of a strategic ploy?[12]

Socrates' depiction of events, with its use of the loaded word "flight," seems designed to make it especially difficult for Laches to approve of the Spartans' behavior. That this is indeed Socrates' intention is confirmed by Laches' reaction to

his portrayal of the events at Plataea. What is most striking about this reaction is Laches' failure to dispute Socrates' depiction of the battle. To be sure, his agreement with Socrates' characterization of the Spartan conduct is far from enthusiastic, which is not surprising since he defined courage as standing one's ground and was baffled at Socrates' first suggestion that fleeing could be deemed courageous. But why does he not mount a stronger defense of the Spartans? Why does he fail to challenge Socrates' description of the Spartans as "fleeing," rather than as retreating in an orderly fashion, the latter being more consistent with Socrates' presentation of the Spartans as having employed a tactical ruse?

With respect to whether or not the Spartans can be understood to have fled the battle, it's possible that Laches doesn't dispute Socrates' choice of words because he fears that the word is appropriate.[13] Although the Spartans may have quit the field for eminently sensible reasons, that they quit the field at all could raise questions about their courage. Socrates' example hits upon and exploits an uneasiness in Laches with any kind of retreat.[14] For if courage is displayed in the moment of truth, the moment one faces the greatest challenge, how does one know—even about oneself—that a retreat is motivated by strategy rather than fear? Leaving a fearful confrontation raises the possibility that one lacked the courage to face it.[15] If Laches indeed suspects that the Spartans' action raised questions about their courage, he would not be alone. According to Herodotus, the Persian commander Mardonius ridiculed the Spartans when he learned about their retreat; he, at least, interpreted it in the ordinary understanding of flight, taunting the Spartans that, despite their reputation as the "best of warriors," their "flight" proved them to be "the most complete nobodies in a nation of Greek nobodies" (IX. 58).[16]

Even if Laches is easily lured into calling the Spartan retreat a "flight," he still might have defended it as courageous by seizing upon Socrates' explanation of that "flight," namely, by affirming that it was a tactical ruse to secure victory. Laches' failure to do so underscores what we have thus far deduced is his understanding of courage. To offer a defense of the Spartans because they employed tactics would be to subordinate courage to the tactical objective, namely, victory. And if courage is subordinate to something else, then its claim to be "among the noblest" things is also diminished; it becomes a means to what is noble instead of noble itself. Insofar as Laches' great admiration for courage is admiration for conduct at the moment of truth, he cannot hold the view that victory is more important than standing one's ground. If he did, he would have to concede that courage cannot always mean standing one's ground, particularly if to do so is not the best means to victory. Because the nobility of courage for Laches lies in the

manner in which one behaves in the direst circumstances, a tactical flight may be prudent, but it does not reveal the greatest courage. If Laches does not defend the Spartan action as a tactical ruse every bit as courageous as standing one's ground, this may be because he believes that when they are employing a tactical ruse, the Spartans do not exemplify the courage he most admires.

Laches' view is neither idiosyncratic nor a mere artifact of Greek notions of courage. Having succumbed as a prisoner of war to brutal torture and signed a "confession of crimes" against the North Vietnamese, Senator John McCain describes his subsequent time in solitary confinement as follows: "They were the worst weeks of my life. I couldn't rationalize away my confession. I was ashamed. I felt faithless and couldn't control my despair. . . . All my pride was lost and I doubted that I would ever be able to stand up to any man again" (McCain 1999, 244). Even many years later, during which time he learned that many others, including those he himself considered brave, had also succumbed to such treatment, McCain said that "he feels no less shame" and that, although he did the best he could, he continues to believe that "the best I could was not enough" (Timberg 1995, 95). Like the motto of the U.S. Marines, "Semper Fi," McCain's intense and persistent shame at signing a militarily inconsequential confession underscores the power of the belief that there are some things a courageous individual simply does not do, *no matter what*.[17]

Having focused on how strongly Laches inclines to think of courage as an end in itself, we must briefly consider the degree to which he *does* think of courage as subordinate to other ends. While Laches does not explicitly agree that in "fleeing," the Spartans acted courageously at Plataea, neither does he deny that they did. If he is in fact uneasy with the thought that flight could be considered courageous, why does he not simply and forthrightly deny that the Spartan action at Plataea constitutes an example of courage? Laches' failure to say this—that is, that he is drawn up short by Plataea—suggests that he cannot wholly discount the importance of strategy, even the preeminence of strategy over courage as he conceives it. We should not forget that his condemnation of the new kind of spear-fighting was partly based on the claim that the Spartans would adopt it if it actually conferred a military advantage. The end of victory, Laches seems to recognize, may make the means, however ignoble they seem in themselves, worthwhile.

Yet, as we have seen, Laches is reluctant to follow through on this thought. Were he to concede that victory alone should dictate how soldiers should fight, he would be admitting that strategic knowledge is more important than the toughness shown by the hoplite. Moreover, were he to grant that courage could

be displayed fully in a strategic retreat, he would also be granting that strategic knowledge is at least as important as courage, even possibly central to it.[18] This centrality, however, threatens to crowd out the nobility of courage. To place too much importance on knowledge may be to attribute greater courage to the soldier with experience and skill than to the ordinary soldier whose lack of special skills or knowledge does not render him unwilling to stand his ground in the face of an enemy onslaught (cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1116b5–25).[19] Put simply, to subordinate the dictates of courage to military prudence may be, in Laches' mind, to deny courage its due.

STEADFASTNESS OF SOUL

Laches' concession—that the Spartans act courageously when they fight their enemies while fleeing—has revealed his first definition to be too narrow. Socrates has thus broadened that definition of courage to cover conduct beyond standing firm. Now he aims to broaden Laches' horizons still further. He tells Laches that he wants to know about those who are courageous not just in hoplite warfare but also in other forms of warfare, as well as in dangers at sea, in sickness and poverty, in politics, in the face of pains and fears, and even in the face of desires and pleasures—whether, he adds, they stand firm against these things or retreat from them (191d–e). Now one may wonder whether courage is involved in all the situations Socrates mentions. One may surely wonder, at least, whether Laches will think it is involved. After all, Laches originally described courage as standing firm in *battle*. Dangers at sea, sickness, and poverty may all be evils, but facing them well may be less noble than facing down one's enemy on the battlefield (see Aristotle, *NE* 1115a10–32). Precisely because the quality Socrates now describes abstracts from the particular dangers one faces on the battlefield, we may wonder whether Laches will agree to call it courage.

Laches at first emphatically agrees that courage is present in all these examples (191e4).[20] But Socrates suspects that Laches may not understand what he is asking and may not actually agree with this broad notion of courage. For despite Laches' enthusiastic agreement, Socrates claims that Laches has not really understood him and thus repeats himself, asking Laches a second time whether someone can possess courage or cowardice in pleasures, pains, desires, and fears. When Laches once again agrees with Socrates' claim about the various manifestations of courage (191e8), Socrates, apparently still convinced that Laches does not in fact agree with him, now simply asks Laches whether he understands what Socrates means, and Laches confesses, "Not altogether" (191e12), thus confirming Socrates' suspicion.

Confronted with the very different examples of battlefield courage on the one hand and bravery in the face of pleasures on the other, Laches is unable, when asked, to think of what they might have in common.[21] In order to help Laches find the common element in these examples, Socrates offers the analogy of swiftness, which he says manifests itself in many different ways, such as in running, playing a musical instrument, speaking, and learning. If he were asked what the thing called swiftness is that is present in all these examples, Socrates says that he would call it "the power of accomplishing much in a short time" (192a–b).

Socrates' example succeeds in sparking Laches to offer a new, more comprehensive definition of courage. He says that if one must say what courage is "by nature in all cases," then it is a "certain steadfastness of soul" (192b–c).[22] Socrates praises this response very highly and agrees that this is indeed what one must say "if we are to answer for ourselves what is asked" (192c2–3). His praise of the definition makes sense. Courage does seem to involve steadfastness in the face of fearful circumstances; toughness or guts seems to be, at the very least, a crucial component of courage.[23]

Socrates, however, now explicitly reveals his doubt that Laches fully endorses his own definition, for he tells Laches that he suspects that "not quite all steadfastness appears to you to be courage" (192c3–5); the "to you" suggests a divergence between him and Laches over what forms of steadfastness qualify as courage. Socrates' suspicion stems from the fact that, as he tells Laches, he "pretty much knows" that the general holds courage "to be among the altogether noble things." Laches corrects him; he holds courage to be "among the *noblest* things" (192c5–6, emphasis added).[24] This opinion, however, exposes Laches' new definition to difficulties. The claim that courage is both a "certain steadfastness of soul" *and* something noble ultimately leads Laches to become confused over whether courage is prudent (192d10–12) or foolish steadfastness (193d6–8). The details of the exchange between Laches and Socrates that follows reveal the reason for Laches' confusion.

Having obtained confirmation that Laches thinks courage is "among the noblest things," Socrates next tries to determine what kind of steadfastness would be noble and hence qualify as courage. He asks Laches whether steadfastness is both noble and good (*kalê kagathê*) when it is accompanied by prudence. Laches agrees readily to this, saying "certainly" (192c10). When, however, Socrates asks him whether steadfastness accompanied not by prudence but by folly is both wicked (*kakourgon*) and harmful (*blaberon*), Laches says only "yes" (192d3), a much less emphatic agreement. He seems uneasy with the direction of Socrates' questions, which suggest that courage is not noble unless it is accompanied by

prudence. Or, at least, Socrates' questions suggest this conclusion insofar as what is wicked and harmful is not noble. Indeed, it is about precisely this last issue that Socrates next inquires. He asks Laches whether he would assert that something that "is wicked and harmful is noble." To this Laches says only that "it would certainly not be just, at any rate" to say so (192d3–6); he does not say that this assertion would be false.

Why does Laches answer as he does? Why does he hesitate to agree that foolish steadfastness is, first, "harmful and wicked" and, second, necessarily ignoble? Regarding the first issue, he may think that foolish steadfastness can be harmful without also being wicked. To be wicked or to do evil is to do more than merely cause harm; it is to cause harm intentionally and without justification. Foolish steadfastness may cause harm, but only unintentionally, in which case it would not be wicked. Take the well-intentioned passerby who, on finding a man drowning in freezing water, jumps in to save him rather than call for help. If the would-be rescuer is overcome by the cold water and both he and the drowning man die, he could easily be said to have acted foolishly and to have caused harm, insofar as his failure to call for help prevented the arrival of assistance that could have led to a successful rescue. But who would say he acted wickedly?

If, however, foolish steadfastness is not always both harmful and wicked, what of those cases where it is? Why does Laches show reluctance to grant that harmful and wicked steadfastness is ignoble, saying only that to grant its opposite "would certainly not be just"? His reluctance means that he entertains at least the possibility that such steadfastness can be noble; he seems unwilling to conclude that clearly unjust acts are clearly ignoble. Perhaps he is thinking of daring individuals who take enormous risks—even putting their lives on the line—in order to accomplish some injustice. Laches seems tempted to think that a morally repugnant act might be noble to the extent that it involves an impressive display of steadfastness. Such a view would hardly be peculiar; we typically do not refuse to speak of certain soldiers who fight for unjust regimes as brave—even noble—just because their courage was exercised in the service of injustice. We call them brave precisely because we have a sense that no matter how it is executed, the simple capacity for steadfastness of soul is impressive and thus somehow noble. Laches exemplifies this inclination by his reluctance to call harmful and wicked steadfastness ignoble; he is not wholly prepared to dismiss the impressiveness of steadfastness itself.[25]

On the other hand, he is not wholly prepared to defend courage as noble without reference to its goals and effects. Whatever his ultimate thoughts about whether a wicked action can still be noble, he refrains from agreeing that foolish

steadfastness is courage. Because Laches will not forthrightly call harmful and wicked steadfastness noble, Socrates concludes that he "will therefore not agree that steadfastness of this sort, at any rate, is courage, since it is not noble and courage is a noble thing" (192d7–8). Laches responds by saying, "What you say is true." While he is unwilling to deny firmly that foolish steadfastness—insofar as it is harmful and wicked—is ignoble, Laches cannot bring himself to say that it is noble either; because he thinks that courage is noble, he cannot therefore call foolish steadfastness courage. As much as he may admire the steadfastness that enables some to take enormous risks or to hold firm in terrifying circumstances, the steadfastness that is for him most worthy of the name "courage" is not exhibited by fools or scoundrels.

What kind of steadfastness, then, deserves the name? Socrates suggests that it must be the opposite of foolish steadfastness. He gets Laches to agree that, according to his own argument, "prudent steadfastness would be courage" (192d10–11). Laches' agreement here establishes a definition that seems to mark a decisive departure from his first definition of courage as standing one's ground. Only to the extent that standing one's ground is *prudent* would it seem to qualify as noble, and therefore as courage.

But Laches' agreement that "prudent steadfastness would be courage" is in fact rather tentative; he says simply that "it seems so" (192d12). His hesitation may seem puzzling, since he has merely accepted here the logical conclusion of his preceding agreements: if courage is both noble and a form of steadfastness, and if only prudent steadfastness is noble, then courage is prudent steadfastness. The reason for Laches' hesitation lies in Socrates' characterization of the steadfastness that might be courage as "prudent." To call courage prudent steadfastness is to say that courage is properly so called only when it is exercised well, which means when it is guided by a wise mind aiming to produce good results. This would mean that courage must be judged according to whether the ends for which it is exercised are worthy and the means undertaken to those ends sensible. But we saw earlier that Laches was unwilling to judge courage by the ends it serves: he conceived of it as displayed in crucial "moments of truth," as an end in itself. The heart of the courage displayed in moments of truth may seem to Laches very far removed from the cool calculation that characterizes prudent action.

Laches' attachment to this "moment of truth" explains his reluctance to define courage as prudent steadfastness. Still, it is revealing that when Socrates initially (192c8–9) praised such steadfastness as good, Laches did not balk. Indeed, he there expressed a very high opinion of prudent steadfastness. He took, at least with part of himself, the view that courage is admirable only if it is guided by a

rational mind for good purposes. But now, as Socrates begins to focus Laches' attention more on the aftermath of courageous action than on that moment of truth, Laches grows more uncomfortable with understanding courage as governed by prudence. Part of the problem for Laches with prudence is connected to what we have seen is his wish to treat courage as an end in itself. To the extent that courage aims at accomplishing a further end, Laches is reluctant to attribute nobility to it. Socrates' attempt to clarify with Laches the circumstances under which steadfastness is prudent and therefore courageous will further clarify Laches' reluctance. Risk now comes to the forefront of the discussion.

Socrates first asks Laches whether the capacity to be steadfast in spending money prudently is an example of prudent steadfastness, that is, courage. Laches is outraged by the suggestion, swearing by Zeus that it is not (192e5). After all, the prudent spender neither faces any danger nor acts for any noble end. But Socrates' suggestion is compatible with the claim that he earlier made and that Laches accepted, namely, that it is possible to be courageous in pleasures as well as pains (191d–e); if this is true, then someone who is steadfast in spending money prudently could be said to display courage in fending off temptations.

Next, Socrates asks whether a doctor is courageous when he steadfastly refuses to give food or drink to his son or to someone else whose illness demands abstention. Again, Laches emphatically denies that this is an example of courage (193a1). It is less clear here that no courage is needed. In treating his own son, a doctor may need to be steadfast in subjecting his son to painful but necessary treatment. The doctor's distress at seeing his son suffer from the denial of food and drink could lead him to waver over the effectiveness of the treatment and even to halt it. On the other hand, even if the doctor remains steadfast in executing the treatment, his action might still fall short of courage in that his steadfastness is in the service of healing his son, surely something that is recognizably a great good for both son and father. In other words, the doctor in this case may demonstrate steadfastness without doing anything noble.

Now the doctor who treats someone else, unlike the father or the prudent spender, might be understood to act for a nobler end; he looks after the health and well-being of others. But ultimately this end does not appear to impress Laches; not only does the doctor, like the prudent spender, face no dangers himself, but treating a sick person is simply not the kind of grand, impressive action Laches associates with courage. The actions of neither the prudent spender nor the tough-minded doctor capture for Laches the essence of courage.

Socrates' draws out what Laches thinks is the essence of courage in his third attempt to define prudent courage. Here Socrates asks Laches about the courage

of a soldier. In contrast, however, to his procedure in the previous two examples, where he simply asked whether a certain kind of steadfastness was courageous, Socrates now asks Laches to compare the courage of two men. Socrates asks him who is more courageous: the man who is "steadfast and willing to fight, calculating prudently and knowing that others will come to his aid, that he will be fighting against fewer and inferior men than those he is with and that he holds stronger ground" or "the one in the opposite camp who is willing to remain standing his ground and to be steadfast" (193a4–9). Unlike the prudent spender and much more so than the doctor, both these men exercise steadfastness in what is for Laches the noblest arena: war.

Socrates' comparative question illuminates Laches' view of the core of courage's nobility. While the prudent and confident soldier might be someone Laches would usually call courageous, when his courage is stacked up against that of the soldier who fights against overwhelming odds, for Laches it falls woefully short. The difference between the two men lies in the risk that each assumes, and Laches attributes greater courage to the fighter who takes greater risks. Now Laches' claim that warriors who stand their ground despite poor odds are more courageous than those who stand firm in full knowledge of their superiority accords with common sense. Precisely because of their superiority, the latter group has less to fear and thus less need for courage. The implication is that courage is manifest most in those warriors whose circumstances are the most hopeless because that is where the need for courage is greatest. Laches, however, proves to find this implication troubling as well. Despite his admiration for them, he cannot wholeheartedly embrace the courage of those who persevere in dire straits; indeed, even as Laches maintains that the soldier in dire straits is the more courageous one, he acknowledges that his steadfastness is more foolish than that of his counterpart (*aphronestera* 193b2–3).

As Walter Schmid notes in his book on the *Laches,* Socrates' example here almost exactly reproduces the scene at the battle of Mantinea where Laches was killed (1992, 11–15). Having seized a strong position on a hill, the Athenians and their Argive allies easily forced a Spartan retreat. The generals (of whom Laches was one) apparently had no intention of pursuing the Spartans until there was something of a mutiny among the soldiers in favor of pursuit. The generals (of whom Laches was one) acceded to their demands, but in the battle that ensued, they lost decisively to the Spartans, who despite committing some almost fatal blunders bested the allies in their courage (V. 72; for an extended account of the battle, see Kagan 1981, 113–37). Laches' association of nobility with risk would have made him especially vulnerable to the demands of the soldiers to pursue the

Spartans and eschew the more prudent option. Schmid argues that by using this example, Plato means to underscore the fact that Laches never learned that courage and honor "must follow, not violate prudence" (1992, 15). This seems right, but the deeper question we must explore is why the alternative remains a compelling temptation. The full implications of this alternative emerge in what follows.

Socrates takes Laches' uneasiness over the steadfast soldier's dire circumstances and pushes him to an extreme position. In his subsequent questions, Socrates presents "foolishness" as the lack of some art or knowledge. He thereby pushes Laches' position to its logical extreme, showing that according to that position, the more one knows when undertaking some risky enterprise, the less courageous one is. Laches is cornered into saying that the cavalry soldier who does not know horsemanship is more courageous than the one who does, that the archer who does not know the art of the bow is more courageous than the one who does, and that those who dive into wells or perform any dangerous task without being "terribly clever" at their work are more courageous than their cleverer counterparts (193b–c). Laches is clearly frustrated at having to agree to these things; when Socrates asks him whether he thinks that the ignorant diver is more courageous than the knowledgeable one, he says in exasperation, "What else would one say, Socrates?" (193c6). Laches sees the logical necessity that forces him to agree here, but he resists doing so, surely for the sensible reason that unlike the unskilled soldier who stands his ground, someone who dives into a well without the expertise required (probably for cleaning the wells) seems foolish rather than brave, at least because the latter does not seem to risk his life for some noble purpose.[26] But despite Laches' awareness that he is agreeing to something dubious, he nonetheless maintains here that he has said what he thinks (193c6).

Increasing Laches' discomfort, Socrates points out the divergence between what Laches maintains now and his grudging concession earlier that foolish steadfastness is ignoble: "Wasn't foolish daring and steadfastness revealed to us in what preceded to be shameful and harmful?"[27] Indeed, Socrates continues, despite Laches' earlier praise for prudent steadfastness, he seems to be saying not only that steadfastness without knowledge is *more* courageous than prudent steadfastness but also that "this shameful thing, foolish steadfastness, is courage." Laches concedes that Socrates is right, but when Socrates presses further and asks him whether what they are saying now is, in Laches' opinion, "fine," Laches responds with an oath: "By Zeus, Socrates, not in my opinion" (193d9). As tempted as Laches is to call those who act without knowledge courageous, he cannot affirm that courage is foolish steadfastness.

On the other hand, he cannot quite deny it either. He is tempted to view foolish steadfastness as courage because he thinks that, if prudence means, as Socrates' examples suggest, knowledge that enables one to minimize risks, courage cannot be prudent steadfastness.[28] Laches insists upon the greater courage of the ignorant warrior because he rebels at the notion, implied especially by Socrates' example of the two soldiers, that prudent courage enables one to minimize dangers. If the knowledgeable warrior is confident of his success, then he will be less likely to have to face that moment of truth that Laches thinks is crucial to courage. Courage's nobility seems to lie for him in the willingness and capacity to face great dangers. What is most admirable about the ignorant warrior is that he risks the most in battle. Precisely, then, because the ignorant warrior acts in a certain sense "imprudently," Laches finds him admirable; overcoming his fears for himself and his life, the ignorant or artless warrior nobly stands his ground. Here courage is noble for Laches because it involves disregarding concerns for one's own safety and being willing to accept great evils.[29]

Yet Laches does not believe that courage is the simple willingness to embrace any and all dangers. At the end of his exchange with Socrates, Laches is left frustrated and perplexed. While he rejects Socrates' suggestion that courage means prudently minimizing dangers, he remains dissatisfied with the view that courage is foolish steadfastness. While Laches admits that his arguments have led to this view, he does not accept it as his own. He concludes that he simply cannot say what courage is (193e). As much as he wants to think of courage as the simple willingness to risk one's own life, he cannot bring himself to endorse this version of courage. He has dimly glimpsed the logic that if the core of courage is steadfastness in the face of great risks and a corresponding willingness to accept whatever harm this causes one to suffer, then the ignorant or "foolish" man who takes the greatest risks appears to be the most courageous. This understanding of courage has additional unfortunate implications: if risk to oneself is the essence of courage, would not any risky action count as courageous? In this case, the ignorant well-diver is as much an example of courage as the soldier who faces down a terrifying enemy on the battlefield. But Laches would likely be as uncomfortable with this position as he is with the claim that courage is "foolish" or ignorant steadfastness.

Laches views courage as "among the noblest things," but he is torn as to the nature of nobility. While in part he thinks that nobility is the simple willingness to stand one's ground, he also thinks that it is something admirable and respectable, that is, not the posture of a fool. And he thinks that to risk one's life for no good end is foolish. He intuits that a serious human life involves more than

the willingness to risk life and thus that the mere willingness to risk one's life does not make that risk worthwhile. Therefore, no matter how splendid or noble a man's willingness to assume great risks is, Laches doubts that it can be truly noble if it is employed for trivial ends.[30] Laches is thus confronted with the following problem: if courage is noble steadfastness but neither prudent nor foolish steadfastness is noble, then in what does its nobility consist?

Laches' inability to answer this question can be explained if we consider why he overlooks a possible solution to the dilemma into which Socrates has led him. Prudent courage need not mean courage that is informed by knowledge of how to minimize dangers to oneself. Soldiers who fight prudently in a battle may do so not to minimize risks but to win victory for their city. Is there not a kind of moral prudence that looks to a good broader or higher than that of the individual actor's own safety? Could not a courage guided by this sort of prudence be noble by navigating between the two extremes described above? Such a courage is neither ignobly prudent, because he who exercises it does so fully prepared to risk everything himself, nor ignobly foolish, because it is exercised with a view to a noble end. But if such a courage is conceivable, why does Laches not mention it? His failure to do so is especially noteworthy since he earlier conceded to Socrates that even the Spartans, whom he so admires, employed tactics that he views as less than noble at Plataea. Could he not have cited Socrates' example of Plataea as an example of prudent steadfastness, which, insofar as it obtained a great victory for Sparta, was also noble?[31]

Laches' failure to appeal to a morally prudent courage prevents him from suggesting how courage could be both prudent and noble. But does his failure merely reveal an intellectual shortcoming in him, or would the appeal in question fail to identify a courage that he would regard as adequately noble? In other words, are there difficulties with this solution that suggest why it cannot be a solution for Laches? Let us recall that Laches never quite agreed with Socrates' presentation of the Spartans' conduct at Plataea as courageous. His reluctance to do so seemed prompted by the thought that, because their conduct could have appeared cowardly and because it used courage merely as a means to an end, it was insufficiently noble. But is not the prudent exercise of steadfastness for the sake of the city noble and hence courageous? Nathan Hale said he regretted that he had but one life to lose for his country; would he have been ignoble had he prudently avoided detection by the British? Why does Laches fail to appeal to the city's good as a way out of his quandary?

As we have seen, Laches resists treating courage as a means to a further end. Laches certainly considers the battlefield to be *the* realm of courage. Now the

most obvious objective of battle is to secure the good of the city. But this suggests that the courage men display on the battlefield is less important and worthwhile than the city itself; on this understanding, courageous men exist and act for the sake of the city. If courage is noble when it serves the city's good, the question then arises as to what is the city's good that it serves. Most obviously, the city provides for the survival and security of its citizens. But are survival and security as noble as the courageous act itself? Can courage be understood as sufficiently noble if its purpose is to serve them?

The problem comes to sight most vividly if one thinks in terms of individuals. The soldier who risks his life so that another may live seems to have acted nobly. But if, in order to avoid being compelled to define courage as foolish steadfastness, we deny that his action—his bravery in the moment of truth—is the end itself and instead say that his action is a means to another's survival, we seem forced to say that his courage is most important as a means to another's life. On this view, life is more important than courage because a means to an end is less important than the end itself (185d–e; cf. *Gorgias* 467c–d). Would this difficulty disappear if the city were to claim that it exists for nobler ends than survival and security? Perhaps the city would be nobler and therefore worthier of one's sacrifice if it claimed to exist precisely to enable men to make just such sacrifices. This possibility, however, is gravely unsatisfying. It implies that a courageous sacrifice is made noble simply because it enables other citizens to make a similar sacrifice for others, and so on; there is only endless sacrificing with nothing that makes any of the sacrifices worthwhile—nothing, that is, beyond the sacrifices themselves. Moreover, insofar as exercises of courage are the city's *raison d'être,* the city should put itself intentionally into unstable and dangerous situations precisely so as to provide opportunities for its citizens to make sacrifices.

Although Laches seems to have a nagging sense that there is nothing about the city that is as noble as the courageous man's steadfastness on the battlefield, this is not the deepest reason for his failure to argue for a morally prudent steadfastness. Or, at least, this nagging sense emerges from something more fundamental. Even if it were possible to conceive of a satisfying way in which the end served by courage is noble, to see courage most importantly as a means would still be unacceptable to Laches. Because he most admires steadfastness displayed under great fire, nothing is as impressive to Laches as courage. Laches does not think of offering public-spirited courage as an example of courage that is both prudent and noble because to concede that the amazing capacity for steadfastness exists to serve other, less impressive ends is to demean what Laches thinks highest; that is, he thinks too highly of courage to see it most importantly as public-spirited.[32]

Laches' inability to suggest a way out of his predicament reflects his belief that the virtuous individual *himself* experiences the peak of life in the exercise of his virtue. Before proceeding, we should briefly consider the objection that Laches' position is immoral. One could, for instance, argue that the true spirit of nobility lies not in exercising virtue for one's own sake but rather in sacrificing for another. This objection, however, slights the theoretical difficulty of interpreting virtue both as something good *and* as a sacrifice. If virtue is both, then the most virtuous act would be to sacrifice the opportunity to act virtuously so that another might do so. But in making this "sacrifice," one reserves rather than sacrifices virtue for oneself because sacrifice is, on the theory being discussed, the essence of virtue. Indeed, one's deference to another's exercise of virtue cannot help but reserve the greatest nobility for oneself. Whatever other difficulties are entailed in Laches' view of courage as an end in itself, it is free of the theoretical one-upsmanship that becomes an issue when one treats virtue as both a great good and as sacrifice.

Moreover, Laches' view comports with the apparent broad agreement among virtuous individuals that virtue *is* good for the virtuous man's soul (see 185e, 190b). The courageous individual, exemplified here by Laches, wants to be capable of accomplishing the daring charge or of enduring the brutal onslaught. Indeed, even in those moments when the courageous individual seems to be making the greatest sacrifice, the actual situation is more complex (cf. Protagoras 359c7–d4). When a courageous individual enters into battle fully aware that he may die for his country and equally aware of how much he thus stands to lose, he would not want it any differently; he would not want to be the kind of person who shrinks from danger. By acting courageously, a man exercises what he understands to be the most important part of himself—namely, his soul (cf. 190b–c, 200e)—in the fullest possible way. Laches' failure to resort to the city as the end that saves courage from foolish steadfastness thus reveals something crucial about the self-understanding of the courageous man. Courageous action may lead to great benefits for others, but it is understood and chosen by the courageous individual above all because it is good in the deepest sense for the courageous man himself.

THE GOODNESS OF COURAGE

If Laches thinks that courage displayed at moments of truth constitutes the peak of human life, why does he not defend courage in this way? He may be unwilling to do so because it is deeply troubling to embrace the thought that the

crowning moment of a man's life occurs only in the midst of evils that lead often to his own and others' destruction.[33] While Laches forcefully illustrates the view of courage as an end in itself, precisely because he remains troubled by that position and unable fully to endorse it does he illustrate just as much the difficulty with that position. It would thus be wrong to see him as a warmonger. Although we have seen that his respect for battlefield risk may have clouded his strategic judgment and led to terrible results for him and his army at Mantinea, he was also a leading proponent of the peace made with Sparta in 423 (Thucydides V.61.1). Undoubtedly Laches admired greatly the most daunting examples of courage, but to be fully noble for him, those examples could never be severed from some higher good.[34] But if seeing courage as the end of life is problematic, why is Laches so attached to this understanding of courage?

We have seen that courage attracts Laches as a virtue the exercise of which reflects the true excellence of a man's soul. But we have also seen his distaste for "prudence" (see especially 192d–93c) and thus his unwillingness to describe the flourishing the courageous man experiences as "good for him." To praise the courageous man as good because he is prudent is not only counterintuitive, it fails to capture the sublime way in which Laches thinks courage is good. If courage is good for the courageous man in the sense of benefiting him, how could we distinguish between the courageous man and the prudent spender, or even the sober-minded doctor? Courage is more than beneficial; it is noble (192c8, 193d4). Its nobility seems to lie precisely in the fact that it is risky for the courageous man himself. The good that courage brings would seem for Laches to be some good that is greater, more satisfying, and more lasting than the ordinary goods human beings pursue. To be sure, Laches never articulates either his wish for or his awareness of such a good. But his belief that courage is both noble *and* good, which he refuses to relinquish, is nevertheless a sign that he hopes for such a good. His hopes for such a great good explain how he can think that courage—with all its potential for pain and suffering—is the peak of virtue.

In the final analysis, Laches may not after all think courage is the greatest good but rather that it promises or makes one worthy of a good much greater and more sublime than any ordinary good of which Laches is aware. The risk that the courageous man takes does not constitute his good but rather makes possible a good with a greater meaning and permanence than any ordinary good. The deepest part of Laches' confusion about courage, then, may be that he seeks in courage something that both constitutes individual fulfillment and at the same time transcends it. As we have seen, his wish for courage to be both prudent and foolish steadfastness leaves him unable to define courage adequately and deeply

frustrated with the conversation. To Socrates he says, "in deed, it is likely, someone would declare that we partake in courage, but in speech, I think, he would not" (193e).[35]

If the conversation between Laches and Socrates fails to yield a coherent definition of courage, their exchange contains elements of what one would include. Apparently in order to galvanize what seems to be Laches' waning interest in their inquiry, Socrates insists that they must be steadfast "in order that courage herself not ridicule us, because we do not seek her courageously" (194a). He thus points to another element crucial to a coherent account: a certain steadfastness or resolve in the face not merely of dangers but also of uncertainty about what is the greatest good for human beings. We must recall that when Laches despairs over their failure to say what courage is, Socrates claims that they do know something about courage, since steadfastness itself may often be courage (194a). Taking Socrates' praise of Laches' definition of courage as steadfastness together with his exhortation to Laches to be courageous (194a) raises the possibility of another meaning of courage: steadfastness in the pursuit of some crucial or essential good for the courageous man—wisdom about courage. But this meaning can form the beginning of a coherent understanding of courage only if it is possible to resolve Laches' contradictory demands of courage. Insofar as a coherent definition of courage requires giving up the view that courage is an end in itself, such a definition is unsatisfying to Laches, as well as to most of us. When we turn to Nicias' definition of courage, we will see better why it is so hard to be satisfied with a coherent definition of courage and what it would take to be satisfied with it.

In the meantime, however, Socrates quietly points to the possibility of a preparatory or precursor version of courage. Socrates' exhortation to Laches to persevere so as not to incur the ridicule of "courage herself" gently appeals to Laches' sense of shame. This appeal suggests that even the pursuit of clarity about one's own virtue can be painful and may therefore need to be bolstered by a passion other than simple concern for one's own good. The character of Socrates' appeal to shame is worth noting. Ordinarily, shame does not seem to encourage radical or probing thought; it is usually rooted in and activated by a profound dependence on conventional opinion. Indeed, at the end of the dialogue, Socrates suggests that shame can impede one's education: when Socrates exhorts all present to seek teachers in order to correct what have been revealed to be defects in their understanding of virtue, he adds, citing Homer, that being needy men, they cannot let ridicule prevent them from seeking teachers despite their advanced age (201a–b; cf. *Odyssey* XVII.347). Socrates implies that a vigorous pursuit of wisdom demands that one be willing to defy common opinion. But

Socrates' appeal to Laches' shame here is not to a conventional notion of shame. He does not appeal to Laches' sense of shame before *others* but rather before a *virtue*: "courage herself." An appeal to this sort of shame is more likely than its conventional counterpart to make Laches and the young boys present take their bearings from the aspiration to virtue itself rather than from the opinions of others. It seems much more likely to spark the steadfastness or resolve needed to acquire wisdom or at least something closer to it (that is, something different from conventional opinion).

But, as we have suggested, whether this notion of courage, which cannot treat courage as an end in itself because of the difficulties we have seen with this position, would satisfy Laches is highly doubtful. If the acquisition of wisdom seems a less vulgar end for courage to attain than, say, money management, it does not obviously require the tremendous steadfastness and tenacity under fire that impresses Laches most of all. Indeed, Laches' reaction to Nicias' attempt to define courage will show how little inclined he is to associate wisdom with courage. Nicias is just the opposite; making prudence the centerpiece of his definition of courage, he argues that courage is the knowledge that allows one to pursue one's own good. As we will see, however, Nicias' definition fares little better than the one offered by Laches; it turns out to be fraught with significant difficulties of its own.

CHAPTER THREE

Courage and Wisdom

Socrates and Nicias

NICIAS' SOCRATISM

Laches' inability to decide whether courage is prudent or foolish steadfastness leaves him and Socrates without a coherent account of courage. Socrates therefore appeals to Nicias to help them discover one. Acceding to Socrates' plea, Nicias claims that he is repeating something that he has often heard Socrates say. Purporting to quote Socrates, he says that "each of us is good in those things with respect to which he is wise and bad in those with respect to which he is without learning." He therefore concludes that "if the courageous man is good, clearly he is wise" (194d). But Nicias' conclusion does not accurately paraphrase Socrates' formulation. What Nicias reports Socrates as saying makes wisdom primary; it suggests that goodness derives from wisdom. A strict paraphrase of Socrates' formulation would say that if the courageous man is wise, he must be good. Nicias' paraphrase reverses the priority. Nicias assumes that the courageous man is good and that he must therefore be wise. Thus, while appearing to make virtue depend on wisdom, Nicias actually does the opposite: he assumes the courageous man is wise because he is good. Nicias' peculiar paraphrase suggests that while Nicias is attracted by the argument that intimately connects wisdom and courage, he may not see how Socrates understands that connection. Moreover, simply tying virtue to wisdom does not explain much. It does not explain, for instance, in what the wisdom that underlies virtue consists.

At any rate, Nicias sides with the part of Laches that resists equating courage with foolishness. Yet Laches seems not to understand him, so in order to explain to the

uncomprehending Laches what Nicias means, Socrates rephrases Nicias' definition of courage as "a certain wisdom" (194d). Mocking this suggestion, Laches asks Socrates to explain himself. Socrates diverts Laches' attention to Nicias, encouraging Laches to ask Nicias what it means to say that courage is a certain wisdom, thereby giving the latter the responsibility of explaining a definition that he, Nicias, did not, after all, quite offer. In order to make Nicias offer a more precise version of the definition he has put in his mouth, Socrates asks Nicias to state what kind of wisdom courage is. Laches chimes in: "Let him say what he asserts courage is" (194e). Nicias rises to the challenge: "This, Laches, is what *I* say it is: the scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*) of terrible and emboldening things in war and in all other things" (195a1–2, emphasis added).[1] If this is more precise than the first definition Socrates attributed to him, it is hardly crystal-clear. What exactly is this knowledge? And does it make courage both noble and good in the way that Laches wants it to be?

Nicias' definition, as many scholars note, bears a striking resemblance to what Socrates says about courage elsewhere. In the *Protagoras* Socrates calls courage wisdom (*sophia*) about what things are terrible and what things are not (*Protagoras* 360d5). Indeed, some commentators suggest that Nicias here is the mouthpiece for Socrates' famous claim that virtue is knowledge.[2] This is incorrect. While there is a great similarity between the two definitions, Nicias' view cannot be understood as a stand-in for that of Socrates. The claim that Nicias and Socrates define courage the same way ignores two details: first, Socrates coaxes Nicias into giving his own definition of courage (cf. 194d1 with 195a1) and, second, his definition differs from what Socrates says in the *Protagoras*. Socrates there speaks of wisdom rather than of scientific knowledge (cf. 195a1 with 194d5).[3] Moreover, in the *Laches* Nicias not only speaks of knowledge and not wisdom, but he includes knowledge of "emboldening things" as part of the knowledge that is courage, and he says that courage is knowledge of these things "both in war *and in all other things*" (195a1, emphasis added).

Staying within the confines of the *Laches,* we can discern a glaring difference between Nicias' second (or own) definition and his first (or parroted) account. To say, as Nicias initially does, that the courageous man is wise if he is good is to say only that the goodness of courage is accompanied by wisdom, that is, that courage *requires* wisdom. This does not necessarily imply, as in Nicias' later formulation, that courage *is* some kind of wisdom or knowledge. Another indication that the two accounts differ—and therefore that Nicias is not Socrates' mouthpiece—is that Socrates explicitly dissociates himself from Nicias' own definition; when Laches protests that Nicias is speaking stupidly, he says in response that they must therefore "teach Nicias" (195a7).

The subsequent conversation treats Nicias as a potential expert on courage. This may or even must seem strange to anyone familiar with Athenian history. Thucydides and Plutarch both report that Nicias was fearful and superstitious; his qualifications as an expert on courage therefore seem suspect. Nicias was also a target of Aristophanes, who coined words that meant "to delay victory like Nicias" (*Birds* 638) and "to get or become flustered like Nicias" (*Knights* 358).[4] While he may be at the height of his power in Athens at the time of the dialogue's setting, his extreme caution and susceptibility to divination later condemn the Sicilian expedition not only to failure but to "total destruction." Not only does his caution lead him to conduct the Athenian campaign that he leads in Sicily poorly (see Orwin 1994, 120–21), but when disaster befalls the Athenian forces, he delays retreating from the island despite the great vulnerability of his fleet for "thrice nine" days because he interprets a lunar eclipse as requiring that he stay put (Thucydides, VII.50).

Part of our task in this chapter, then, is to understand why a man known for neither his courage nor his reasonableness is the spokesman for a hyperrational account of courage and what the inadequacies of Nicias' defense of this account reveal about the difficulties in identifying courage with knowledge or wisdom. As we will see, Nicias cannot coherently defend his definition of courage. His hyperrationalism—and his eventual rejection of it—will be found to be rooted in his fearfulness; because he sets very high standards for knowledge, his retreat from knowledge when it fails to live up to those standards is both swift and complete. If, then, Nicias' definition of courage is a corrupted version of what he has "often heard" Socrates say, we must consider whether its weaknesses shed light on Socrates' famous claim that virtue is knowledge, perhaps by revealing what Socrates can and cannot mean by that claim. In other words, Nicias' peculiar formulation of courage as a kind of knowledge may reveal more about Nicias than about Socrates, but its kinship with Socrates' famous claim may also permit us to glimpse the outline of a superior formulation.

COURAGE AS KNOWLEDGE

As we have said, Nicias offers a hyperrational definition of courage. He rejects the less radical and more defensible view that courage *requires* wisdom. This latter view, after all, makes a certain sense; someone who confronts dangers while being blithely ignorant of their existence hardly faces them courageously. The man who walks through a dangerous neighborhood with no inkling that it is dangerous is not courageous. But more can be said on behalf of the claim that

courage requires wisdom. For any mildly thoughtful person can be, like Laches, made to take seriously the possibility that the courageous man must understand something of the ends for which courage should be employed in order to act truly courageously. Many individuals exhibit great daring, but insofar as they do so foolishly or in a manner that causes harm, human beings balk at speaking of them as fully courageous. As we have seen with Laches, people who are serious about courage can be led to resist attributing it to fools or scoundrels.

To concede the importance of some wisdom to courage, though, is not to identify courage with wisdom. The strangeness of Nicias' identification of the two is underlined by Laches' disgusted reaction to it. After insisting that "wisdom is doubtless distinct from courage," Laches swears by Zeus that Nicias is "talking rubbish" (195a5–7). Laches seems to think that Nicias is making no effort to help identify courage but is rather resorting to sophistry. To prove his point, Laches relies on the fact that Nicias defined courage as knowledge of "terrible and emboldening things" in *all* areas of life. Mocking Nicias, he cites examples of artisans who know the "terrible and emboldening things" in their fields but who hardly seem courageous for that reason (195b–c). Can a doctor who knows the terrible things in medicine—illnesses—really be called courageous? Is a farmer courageous for knowing about crop pests?

Laches, however, has apparently misunderstood Nicias, for Nicias denies that a doctor is courageous "in any way at all" (195b7). But if, according to Nicias, courage is knowledge about terrible and emboldening things, why is courage not medical knowledge? Why is knowledge of, as Nicias puts it, "what is unwholesome and healthful" for the sick not knowledge of something terrible and emboldening? Perhaps Nicias denies that the doctor's knowledge is courageous because of what we indicated in the previous chapter: in his capacity as doctor, a doctor's knowledge concerns what is terrible for his patients rather than for himself. That Nicias has such considerations in mind is suggested by the fact that war is the only field he mentions by name where knowledge of the terrible and emboldening things constitutes courage ("both in war and in all other things" [192a]). Indeed, his mention of war suggests that he thinks courage operates where human beings are forced to confront not just dangers to themselves but grave dangers. After all, the farmer whose crops are at risk differs from the doctor in that he faces the danger of personal losses, but Nicias also denies that farmers possess courage, very likely because they do not undertake dangers comparable to those one faces "in war." We cannot conclude, however, that Nicias thinks that courage is knowledge concerning only mortal dangers like war, for we do not know exactly what he means by knowledge of terrible and emboldening things in "all things" other than war.

However far the knowledge reaches, how can courage not only involve but actually *be* knowledge of (genuinely) terrible things when such knowledge hardly seems to guarantee one's ability to face terrors well? Knowing that one faces "terrible things" may be a necessary condition for courageous action, but it does not seem sufficient; one might, for instance, find it necessary to jump from a burning building in order to save one's life yet remain unable to do so. This may explain why Nicias does not say simply that courage is knowledge of terrible things. He says that it is knowledge as well of "the emboldening things," as though knowing that we possess things like strength or skill emboldens us to confront dangers. But if such knowledge is integral to courage, this means that Nicias does not think that courageous action is possible without the knowledge that one has good reason at least to hope to triumph over dangers. We can now provisionally explain Nicias' opaque definition as follows: courage is both the knowledge that one must face something terrible for oneself—a sufficiently momentous and perhaps even mortal danger—and the knowledge that gives one hope of overcoming it.

Yet this provisional explanation still does not show how knowledge suffices to constitute courage. Insofar as one's knowledge of emboldening things gives one only reasonable *hopes* of overcoming danger, might not one still need something else to face it well?[5] Although he has said that he agrees with Laches that neither doctors nor farmers are courageous, Nicias still insists that courage is knowledge. He proceeds to explain why what doctors and farmers know is not the knowledge he has in mind. Focusing on doctors, Nicias maintains that they lack knowledge of whether "it is terrible for someone to be healthy rather than to be sick." This, not knowledge of "what is healthful and unwholesome," is what counts for Nicias (195c8). While artisans may know what is generally good and bad in their own arts, they do not know the most important thing: what is truly good and bad for an individual.

Nicias argues, with Laches' agreement, that it is not always better for people to survive illnesses (195c–d); while doctors may know that health is in general good, in their capacity as doctors they do not know whether it is good for a particular individual. He does not elaborate, but he may have in mind examples like that of the man who has lived so long that all his friends and loved ones, even his children, have died. Nicias implies that if the doctor is the one who knows how to keep such a man alive, the courageous man is the one who knows whether or not the doctor should do so. For Nicias, such knowledge seems not just to inspire hope that an evil can be overcome but rather to teach whether the evil *should* be overcome, that is, to teach whether what is evil under most conditions truly is evil in a particular case.

Now this understanding of courage may seem extreme or just plain odd; we shall soon see that Laches has no idea what to make of it. In effect, Nicias' definition implies that one is courageous only when one knows what is truly best—for oneself and for others. This seems to defy common sense, which does not call courageous only those who act out of a certainty that they pursue the best course of action. On the contrary, we tend to describe as courageous those who act boldly in the face of uncertainty or who risk incurring what is terrible for themselves (cf. *Protagoras* 359c–d). But Nicias' characterization of courage is not wholly contrary to common sense either. As Nicias and Laches earlier agreed, when virtue is present, it makes the soul better (190b4–6; cf. 185e13). Their agreement on this reflects the common-sense view that virtue is somehow good for the virtuous man himself and for those on whose behalf he exercises his virtue. Nicias' definition of courage seizes upon and takes to an extreme that aspect of common sense that holds that, to the extent that he has virtue, the courageous man both knows what he is doing and does some good, even for himself.

But has his definition in fact done this? In denying courage to doctors, Nicias indicates that they do not know whether "it is better for all to live and not better for many to die." But that an individual might be better off dead may not quite mean that death is *good* for him. Nicias may mean only that the courageous man must know how to choose the lesser of two evils—not necessarily a genuine good. Indeed, if one always knew how to obtain only such goods, one's knowledge might seem not to constitute but to *preclude* the need for courage. In the spirit of Laches' earlier resistance to the claim that courage is prudent steadfastness, common sense would hold that courage is unnecessary for the man who knows that goods lie ahead for him, for he has nothing to fear. The situation would be very different if knowledge enabled one only to compare or judge among various evils. Such knowledge would be useful but would also leave room for something in addition, for example, something like the steadfastness (*karteria*) of soul that Laches suggested was courage (192b9).[6]

To take the example Nicias mentions in his definition, we can easily imagine soldiers facing death bravely in war because they "know" that dying for their city is preferable to the dishonor of flight or the deaths of their loved ones. But death is such a painful prospect to contemplate that one must wonder if knowledge alone can suffice to inspire courageous actions. Or might not knowledge, especially when it is only of evils, waver in the face of a choice between apparent evils? If choosing the lesser of two evils is the best one can do under certain conditions, the question is whether one will lose sight of the conditions that make this choice sensible. Because human beings do not live only in the moment, they can hope

for a change in conditions. Much seems to depend on one's time frame. Were the aging invalid we mentioned earlier, for example, to recover from his illness and fall in love again, it would be much harder to say that death would be really best for him. Indeed, insofar as one cannot know enough truly to *know* what is best under the circumstances, might not the hope for the eventual arrival of a genuine good, as opposed to merely the lesser of two evils, prove so strong that one cannot be courageous enough to settle for the latter?

In light of these considerations, we should consider carefully whether Nicias, at least, truly thinks that the knowledge of a good, at least a good in the circumstances, adequately qualifies as courage.[7] In order to explain further to the skeptical Laches what such men know, Nicias argues that "the same things that are terrible for those for whom it is *profitable* (*lusitelei*) to die" are not the same as the things that are terrible "for those for whom it is *profitable* to live" (195d4–9, emphasis added). What does "profitable" mean here? If death under certain conditions is better than the alternatives, it might make sense to say that it is best to die. But it is strange in such a situation to speak of profit; to choose the lesser of two evils is to cut one's losses.[8] How, then, does Nicias think that death can be profitable? Perhaps he is thinking of a splendid death that could bring one everlasting glory. The prudence and cautiousness that characterize Nicias' praise of *hoplomachia,* however, are not emblematic of a man seeking glory; he praised *hoplomachia* largely for helping to ensure safety in battle. Nicias seems to be a man of caution who does all he can to avoid bringing any misfortune upon himself.[9]

An earlier passage in the dialogue suggests how Nicias may conceive of death as profitable. There, in the course of explaining why he is willing to be examined by Socrates, Nicias claims that a concern for living sufficiently nobly, and thus a willingness to "suffer" Socrates' examinations, is necessary for anyone who "takes forethought concerning his life afterward" (*ton epeita bion,* 188b1).[10] The ambiguity of the language leaves it unclear whether Nicias wants to know how to become better simply for the sake of the rest of his mortal life or out of a concern for how he might fare after his death. The latter both appears more likely in light of, and makes sense of, his later statement that death can be profitable: if living nobly enables one to obtain a reprieve from a terrible fate after death, it may, in fact, be possible for death to be profitable.

Now Homer's teaching that all souls receive the same fate after death, namely, a shadowy, miserable existence in Hades (*Iliad* XX.60–66; *Odyssey* XI.475–90, XXIV.6–10), may raise doubts that Nicias could think there might be some profit after death. There are, however, exceptions to Homer's general depiction of man's fate after death as horrible. Sisyphus, Tityos, and Tantalus, for example,

all received especially gruesome punishments for having offended the gods (see *Odyssey* XI.576–93; cf. Pindar, *Olympian* I.52–62). By contrast, the seer Teirisias received the unique privilege of keeping his mind when he went to Hades (*Odyssey* X.490–95), and Menelaus escaped death altogether because the gods sent him to the Elysian fields, where he would enjoy "the easiest life for mortals" (IV.561ff.). Even according to Homer, then, the gods can make death more or less terrible for mortals (IV.136, 205–10; see also Aeschylus, *Supplices* 228).[11]

We find even more explicit accounts of the afterlife in Plato's dialogues. In the *Gorgias,* for example, Socrates recounts to Callicles a myth about the afterlife in which human beings are rewarded or punished according to how they have lived their lives. The myth suggests that those who have lived justly and piously will go after they die to the "Isles of the Blessed," where they will "dwell in total happiness apart from evils." By contrast, those who have lived unjustly and godlessly will go "to the prison of retribution and judgment which they call Tartarus" (523a–b). The existence of such rewards and punishments after death are not, moreover, mere inventions of Plato or his Socrates. Far from injecting a wholly new strand into traditional Greek piety, Plato's Socrates seems to develop an existing one. Callicles may consider what Socrates describes to be a myth, but Callicles is clearly familiar with the tale (523a1–2). Cephalus, the old father who converses with Socrates at the beginning of the *Republic* and who is representative of traditional Greek piety, does not believe that the same fate awaits all men after death. He claims that the man who is unaware of having committed any unjust deed has "sweet and good hope," which eases his "suspicion and terror" about what may happen to him after his death (330e–31a; see also *Republic* 363c–e, 614b–19e; *Phaedo* 107c–8c, 112e–15a; *Apology* 40c–41c). To return to Nicias himself and whether he would have held out hope for or fear of such rewards and punishments, we should note that during his life, the "mysteries" were taken so seriously that opponents of Alcibiades were able to stir sentiment against him and get him recalled from the largest military mission ever undertaken by Athens, the Sicilian expedition, so that he might stand trial for mocking the "mysteries" (see Thucydides VI.28, 53). One could even be sentenced to death for revealing them (cf. Andocides, "On the Mysteries").

Whatever Nicias' hopes might be, though, Laches at least takes Nicias to mean that he who has the profitable knowledge Nicias describes must at least be able to predict the future. When Socrates asks Laches whether he understands what Nicias is saying, Laches insists that he does; he says that Nicias is "calling diviners courageous" (195e).[12] In fact, Laches understands Nicias to be saying that *only* diviners can be courageous, because only they can know whether or not some

good will result from an action. Not surprisingly, Laches scoffs at this position. First, such an account of courage excludes those whom Laches considers to be most courageous. To insist that courage requires certain knowledge that some good or, more precisely, some "profit" will result from one's actions is to deny courage to all men who stand firm in battle but cannot interpret omens. Second, this account of courage seems to eliminate the need for courage understood as Laches understands and admires it, namely, as noble risk-taking. Nicias has implied that death is not terrible for a man for whom it is profitable to die. The courageous man who knows how to profit from death would be less admirable in Laches' eyes because he would have less need for the steadfastness that Laches thinks is the essence of courage.

Nicias, however, does not back down before the scoffing Laches. Rather, he indicates that Laches does not grasp just how comprehensive the knowledge he has in mind is. He denies that he means diviners are courageous; they, he says, "know only the signs of the things that will be—whether death or illness or loss of property will come to someone or victory or defeat either in war or in some other competition" (195e–96a). Nicias does not deny that diviners know the future or that their knowledge is crucial for courage. Nicias' concern with profit, however, explains why he denies that the diviner's knowledge is courage: to know the outcome of future events is not to know whether individuals will profit from them. As Nicias goes on to say, "whether it is better for someone either to suffer or not to suffer these things—why does it belong to the diviner to judge rather than to anyone else at all?" (196a1–4). If diviners know something about the future, they do not know about the whole of human life, and therefore they do not know what is truly profitable for a human being. Their predictions thus provide insufficient guidance about how to live.

Our interpretation to this point has suggested that Nicias thinks human beings can truly face terrible things, or evils, courageously only if they know how their actions will ultimately be profitable to them. This interpretation receives further support from his statement that the courageous man knows whether it is better for someone either to suffer *or not to suffer* things such as "death or illness or loss of property" (196a, emphasis added). By speaking of knowing whether it is better to suffer or not to suffer these things, Nicias implies that they can be avoided, including death. Now surely Nicias does not think he can indefinitely choose not to die. But his speaking of choosing not to suffer it suggests at least that he thinks it can be delayed. In light of the preceding argument, his statement as a whole suggests that he thinks one can delay death and other evils until they are profitable.

This raises a crucial question: can human beings on their own possibly effect such delays, or are they possible only through the providential intervention of external forces? Nicias suggests that here, at least, we are not simply at the mercy of forces beyond our control.[13] He thinks that a certain kind of knowledge, namely, courage, can give us power over our future; he seems to think that this knowledge can tell us not only of profitable goods but also which apparent evils (which, being merely apparent, are goods) are profitable for us, and this enables us to submit to the latter when and only when they are no longer genuine evils.[14] The knowledge in question would seem to be so great that we may wonder if human beings can possibly possess it. Laches does not think this is possible; he scoffs at Nicias' claim, saying that according to Nicias' definition only a god could be courageous (196b1). As both Blitz (1975, 219) and Schmid (1992, 142–45) note, Nicias does not respond to this charge; as we will see, Laches is not far off the mark.

At this stage, we have seen that whatever the precise extent of the knowledge Nicias calls courage, he thinks it must include knowledge of how the evils we face may be confronted so as to yield profit. Nicias thus goes beyond arguing that the courageous man must know enough to choose the least of the evil alternatives he faces in a terrifying situation. Whether it is sensible to insist that courage lead to one's future profit depends in part on whether the knowledge Nicias has in mind is available to human beings—and in part on our ability to glean the coherent meaning of virtue.

NATURAL STRENGTH AND PRUDENT FORETHOUGHT

After accusing Nicias of making "vain and empty speeches" (196b), Laches is ready to give up on the conversation. Socrates takes over the interrogation, but he tells Laches that his examination of Nicias "will be a common one on behalf of me and you" (196c–d). When he takes over, Socrates does not at first press the questions of how extensive the knowledge is that Nicias thinks constitutes courage and whether it is available to human beings. Instead, Socrates draws out the implications of Nicias' thesis. He argues that anyone who thinks of courage as Nicias does must "of necessity" deny that wild animals can be courageous: if neither doctors nor diviners (*qua* doctors and diviners) have the knowledge required for courage, then, "according to a certain proverb," surely "not every sow" would have it (197d–e). And, he adds, Nicias does not "trust the Crommyonian sow to be courageous either" (197e), referring to the fierce beast whom Greek myths depicted Theseus as slaying (see Plutarch 1864, 7). Socrates here brings

out Nicias' departure from the ordinary view that often speaks, however loosely, of certain animals as courageous. In doing so, he implies a possible objection to Nicias' thesis: if courage depends on animal-like qualities or on some kind of natural bearing that precedes knowledge, courage cannot simply be knowledge.

Laches at least seems to think that Socrates' point is decisive; he challenges Nicias either to say that "these wild animals, which we all agree are courageous, are wiser than we" or "to dare to say they are not courageous" (197a). So certain is Laches that wild animals are courageous that he is sure Nicias' thesis is wrong if it denies it. He clearly thinks that the natural strength, impressive bearing, and spirited fierceness that certain animals exhibit show that courage is not dependent on knowledge, let alone identical to it. And while one might deny that bestial fierceness and strength are properly termed courage, there is something sensible in Laches' view. Socrates points out that, according to Nicias' argument, the "lion and deer and bull and monkey are by nature alike as regards courage" (196e). His list of animals reminds us that some display natural dispositions that appear more courageous than others; deer are timid, and lions are not.[15] Human beings also differ in this way. Even if courage in human beings has something to do with knowledge, it hardly seems entirely explained by knowledge. Some prisoners of war hold up under intense interrogation, and some do not; some people remain calm in a crisis, while others lose their heads. Is it clear that the former *know* something that the latter do not? Do not these examples suggest that some kind of natural strength or toughness is, if not courage itself, at least an important component of it?

Laches' challenge to Nicias over bestial courage reminds us of another aspect of courage that does not seem reducible to knowledge: daring. Laches asks Nicias whether he has the daring or audacity to "contradict us all" and deny courage to animals (197a); does Nicias' acceptance or refusal of Laches' challenge depend on his knowledge as opposed to something else, something subrational? The example of animals suggests not, insofar as an animal's natural sense of its own strength gives rise in it to a kind of daring. While human daring differs from the bestial kind, it may nonetheless depend on an underlying natural strength that renders one confident enough to undertake risky endeavors. If so, Laches himself seems to lack the natural foundation for daring,[16] for his challenge to Nicias amounts to a condemnation of those who flout common opinion. Having almost equated courage with daring, he is ready to condemn Nicias for daring to dispute common opinion. Laches' challenge to Nicias reveals a certain weakness in him. His high estimation of common opinion suggests that he may lack the inner strength to think unconventionally. The particular fearfulness Laches displays

here ironically confirms his own insistence that some kind of natural inner strength is crucial for courage.

Nicias, by contrast, is daring enough to defy common opinion about the meaning of courage, at least for the purposes of this argument. Taking up Laches' challenge, he denies that wild animals can be courageous and thus that the strength and spirit that we find in some animals as well as in some human beings are elements of courage. Nicias "dares" to say this because, according to him, one who "does not fear terrible things on account of ignorance" is not courageous but "fearless and stupid." Indeed, he maintains that only "a very few people have a share in courage and forethought, whereas very many—among men and women and children and wild animals—have a share in boldness and daring and fearlessness with lack of forethought" (197a–b). Nicias thus lumps the fearless actions of women and most men together with those of children and animals. Now we can see why Nicias might include children in the same category as animals; they only *seem* courageous in the face of terrible situations because they are ignorant about just how terrible these situations are. Children are not brave for running in front of moving cars; they merely do not understand what can happen to them. Moreover, they do not use forethought; they tend not to think very much about the ends they pursue. Because adults surely differ, however, from children and animals in their capacity to recognize future dangers and nonetheless act, is it fair to say that what "the many call courageous" is merely ignorant boldness (197c1)?

It is if one holds Nicias' extreme view of courage. Dismissing the bold things that the many erroneously call courageous, Nicias says that "I call courageous the *prudent things* about which I am talking" (197b, emphasis added). In light of what Nicias has already said about the courageous man's knowledge, it appears that by "prudent things," Nicias means knowing when it is prudent—or profitable—to confront evils.[17] Anyone who undertakes some courageous action without knowing this seems to be merely "bold" in Nicias' view because to act without knowledge of the "prudent things" is to operate on the basis of mere hope. Bold men and women may manage to profit from their boldness, but their success, according to Nicias, is indistinguishable from luck. And relying on luck is not virtuous; why should someone be admired for the happenstance that events turned out in his favor? Thus, the reason Nicias attributes boldness rather than courage not just to "children and wild animals" but to "very many among men and women" seems to be that very few human beings face terrible things with the knowledge of how to profit from them.

Nicias' characterization of courage as "the prudent things" thus constitutes a refusal to budge from his implicit denial that courage contains a subrational

element. We should briefly remind ourselves of why his refusal to budge is the logical product of his understanding of courage. If courage really is a knowledge that tells one how to profit when confronting dangers, then knowledge suffices on its own for courage; it needs no support, subrational or otherwise, because he who knows how to profit from potential evils never really faces genuine ones. Neither steadfastness of soul nor daring would be necessary, according to Nicias' view, for there would be no risk of becoming uncertain about either the goodness or the attainability of one's objective when faced with a potential evil.[18]

But if Nicias means by courage such comprehensive knowledge, why does he even speak of knowing "terrible things"? Does he use the phrase merely to depict the way things look to those who lack knowledge, that is, those who lack courage? Or does his use of the phrase indicate that he himself does not quite believe that the knowledge he sketches is possible to attain? Nicias still may speak of "terrible things" because he remains fearful—hardly without reason—about many things, including and perhaps especially his ultimate fate. If, moreover, Nicias lacks such knowledge, then perhaps it is not only the case that he cannot act courageously as he understands the term, that is, in full knowledge of what is prudent for him to do. He may also be unable to act in a way that would conventionally be called courageous. The degree to which he stresses the importance of knowledge to courage suggests that any ignorance he has about how to profit from apparent evils leaves him highly susceptible to fear. In the next section, we shall see that insofar as the knowledge that Nicias can imagine human beings acquiring is too limited to free them from all evils, his deeply fearful nature leads him to retreat from his own definition of courage.

THE TERRIBLE AND EMBOLDENING THINGS

Before Socrates proceeds with his examination of Nicias, he must once again cajole Laches into remaining a part of the conversation. Laches is furious[19] over Nicias' account of courage, which he considers to be ignoble and to deny courage to most men. Indeed, an all-out fight between the two seems averted only when Socrates calms Laches by saying that Nicias is merely repeating what he has heard Socrates' and Nicias' comrade, the sophist Damon, say (197d). When Laches responds by censuring Nicias for associating and conversing with such types, especially because Nicias is a civic leader, Socrates rebukes Laches for his criticism of Nicias and insists that inquiring into just such definitions as the one Nicias (and, implicitly, the sophists from whom Nicias has heard such things) has offered is to "partake in the greatest prudence" (197e). Laches reluctantly

agrees to proceed with the conversation but leaves it to Socrates to examine Nicias for both of them.

In his concluding round of questions, Socrates brings out an incoherence in Nicias' understanding of courage.[20] Socrates begins by asking him whether he believes that courage is a *part* of virtue, and Nicias replies that he does. But by the end of their exchange, Socrates has elicited his agreement that courage must be knowledge of all goods and evils in all conditions and that it is therefore the *whole* of virtue. This means, as Socrates points out, that Nicias has contradicted himself, and the dialogue concludes with Nicias' being revealed, like Laches, "to know nothing about courage" (200a5). Now Socrates' refutation of Nicias may itself seem sophistic, as though Socrates merely outmaneuvers him on a technical point. But if Nicias is merely tricked into contradicting himself, why does he not correct his error on the spot? That is, why does he not relinquish either the view that courage is a part of virtue or the view that it is the whole of virtue, and what does his failure to do so reveal about both his understanding of courage and his own character?

Socrates begins Nicias' final examination by setting its parameters. First, he secures Nicias' agreement that they have been investigating courage as a part of virtue (198a)—courage is one part of virtue; moderation and justice are other parts. In agreeing to Socrates' description of virtue as having parts, Nicias at this stage likely has something like the following in mind: the knowledge that is courage is limited to how one acts in the face of terrible and emboldening things and thus involves knowing something different from that which one needs to act, for example, justly or moderately.

Socrates next articulates what he and Laches mean by "the terrible and emboldening things," knowledge of which Nicias claims constitutes courage; he wants to know whether or not Nicias agrees with them. Socrates defines terrible things as those things we fear. He then adds that fear is caused not by past or present evils but "by those that are expected," since fear is "the expectation of future evil" (198b7). This description seems perfectly straightforward until we reflect upon the word "expectation": Socrates presents fear not as the *knowledge* of future evil but only as the expectation of it. His formulation implies an extraordinary (perhaps even counterintuitive) corollary: we fear something when we believe that it is likely to harm us, not when we are absolutely certain that it will.[21] This implies that fear involves uncertainty, that it arises when we face an evil that we hope to avoid—that, in short, a condition for our fearing an evil is the hope of avoiding it. If fear thus goes hand in hand with the hope of avoiding evil, then one who has no hope has no fear; when all hope disappears and one knows in

one's bones that one must face a certain evil, the fear of it disappears too (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1383a5–10, and Thomas 1964, 2.1 Q.41, A.2). If Socrates means the language he uses here to describe fear precisely, then he implies that it is accompanied by hope rather than hopelessness. In this case fear really is, as Socrates says, the *expectation* of evil. This would mean, to put the point forcefully, that the condemned man who still hopes for a stay of execution experiences fear but that the one who has given up all hope of avoiding death does not; the latter might feel sadness or resignation, but not fear.[22]

Vera Brittain illustrates this point in her poignant autobiography of her time as a nurse's aid during World War I. Describing her deteriorating spirit as the war progressed, she says that "having now no hope, and therefore no fear," she simply did not bother to pick up the newspaper to read the casualty lists (1933, 447). A similar sentiment is articulated very powerfully in a scene from Steven Spielberg's film *Jaws*. The captain of the ship that is pursuing the shark of the film's title is a veteran of the U.S.S. *Indianapolis,* which delivered the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War II and which was sunk soon after completing its mission. During a lull in the movie's action, the captain describes to his shipmates his experience trying to stay alive in the shark-infested waters during the several days that elapsed between the sinking of the *Indianapolis* and his rescue and that of his fellow survivors. His tale is harrowing. As the sharks swarmed, the sailors sought to fend them off by splashing and kicking at them. Despite these efforts, the sharks took several hundred men. But as terrifying as this ordeal was, the narrator of the tale says that he was most frightened in the anxious period immediately preceding his rescue, as he awaited his turn to be plucked from the sea by helicopters. His fear of death thus swelled with his hope of escaping, which supports the suggestion that fear depends on the expectation—not knowledge—of future evil, that is, on an abiding hope of avoiding it.

Having defined terrible things as expected evils, Socrates also defines emboldening things in terms of the future; they are "future non-evils or goods" (198c). Laches readily endorses both of Socrates' definitions, after which Nicias assents to them, too (198b–c). That is, he agrees that the terrible and emboldening things are expected—and therefore uncertain—evils, non-evils, and goods. If courage is knowledge of all these things, its subject matter is comprehensive indeed.

Socrates shows, however, that it must be even more comprehensive than his formulation suggests when he turns to explore what it means to *know* the terrible and emboldening things. Let us recall that Nicias describes courage as

epistêmê, or scientific knowledge. What could he mean by a scientific knowledge of uncertain goods and evils? To find out, Socrates first explains what he and Laches understand by *epistêmê.* Socrates cites medicine, farming, and generalship as examples of scientific knowledge; all of these are practical sciences concerned with bringing about particular ends (health, crops, and victory). These sciences, however, are not concerned only with the future; every *epistêmê* also concerns itself with how its ends were attained in the past and are attained in the present (198d–e). Nicias accepts this view because *epistêmê* transcends time; knowledge of future things in farming, for instance, does not differ from knowledge of past or present things. If courage is a true *epistêmê,* then it, too, embraces past, present, and future. But if this is true, then we have reached an extraordinary conclusion. As Socrates states it, courage according to Nicias must be knowledge not only of future goods and evils but of those "that are coming into being and that have come into being and that are in all conditions" (199b–c).

Socrates solicits Nicias' assent to every stage in this unfolding argument. But as it proceeds, Nicias agrees more and more weakly. To its conclusion he offers the noncommittal statement, "it seems so at least" (199c3). Nicias is uneasy with the extent of the knowledge he now understands is implied in his definition of courage, but he is unable to disagree with any of Socrates' formulations. Armed, then, with Nicias' agreement concerning the expansive character of courage, Socrates proceeds to inquire about the individual who possesses it. He asks Nicias whether this person would "lack anything of virtue" (199d5–6). With this question he forces on Nicias a version of the thought we earlier suggested was implicit in Laches' outrage over Nicias' definition of courage. Laches seemed to glimpse that if courage really is profitable knowledge, then there is no room for the impressive steadfastness that Laches thinks is noble. Differing from Laches, Socrates here does not question whether courage as comprehensive knowledge of goods and evils is a virtue but rather suggests that it precludes all other virtues or, rather, obviates the need for them. He asks of Nicias the following leading question concerning the man who possesses this virtue: "Do you think that this one would be in need of moderation or justice and piety—he to whom it belongs, concerning both gods and human beings, to be thoroughly on his guard for the terrible things and for those that are not and to provide himself with the good things by means of knowing how to associate with them correctly?" (199d–e). Socrates then concludes that Nicias is describing a man who possesses not a part of virtue but "virtue entire." His description of the man with "virtue entire" brings to a peak the notion that virtue must be good for the virtuous man. For this man's courage—that is, his knowledge—enables him to be "on guard" for

terrible things and to "provide himself" with good ones. In other words, this man's virtue is profitable for him. He would seem to have everything for which Nicias could hope in virtue. Yet Nicias is less than enthusiastic about the conclusion that Socrates expresses. He says weakly only that "it seems so" (199e7; cf. 199e12).

In fact, three responses later Nicias has rejected the view that the courageous man possesses virtue entire. For when Socrates proceeds to point out that the view of courage as "virtue entire" conflicts with the view of it as a part of virtue, Nicias agrees that they "have not found out what courage is" (199e9).[23] Nicias is unprepared to accept that courage is the whole of virtue since it means rejecting the notion that virtue has parts, including courage and piety among others, although his confession of ignorance means that he cannot articulate this thought. But why is Nicias drawn to the view that courage is only a part of virtue? Why does he, having emphasized so much the importance of prudence and profit, fail to embrace Socrates' claim that courage is "virtue entire"? The grounds for his refusal emerge from two features of his final exchange with Socrates—Socrates' discussion of the hierarchy existing between generalship and divination, and his claim that if courage is "virtue entire," the courageous man does not need the virtue of piety. It is after this claim that Nicias relinquishes his definition of courage rather than relinquish his view of virtue as parts.

To understand Nicias' retreat we must consider Socrates' discussion of generalship. Socrates uses generalship along with farming and medicine to illustrate the character of scientific knowledge. The *epistêmê* that is generalship, he says, "uses forethought in the finest manner regarding the things relating to war" (198e). Then, for a reason he does not explain, he suddenly compares generalship to the art of divination.[24] Because generalship has "finer knowledge of the things relating to war" than the diviner's art, Socrates says that generalship must rule divination rather than the other way around; indeed, "the law ordains thus" (198e–99a). This reference to divination here surely reminds Nicias, who relies so much on divination, of the limitations of scientific knowledge as human beings possess it. Or, more precisely, it surely reminds him, as it does us, of the limitations of practical sciences like generalship, that is, sciences that seek practical ends; we do not know enough to guarantee the attainment of the ends we seek through practical science. As farming cannot predict the weather and its effects on crops, generalship cannot guarantee military success because generals cannot know all the particulars that may affect their battle plans; both sciences lack perfect predictive power. In light of this fact, it is not surprising if human beings turn away from science for assistance, particularly when the stakes are high. In-

deed, in the ancient world it was common for military leaders not to launch battles until omens indicated that conditions favored their side. As we noted, Herodotus reports that at Plataea the Persians and Greeks stood facing each other for ten days because the omens on both sides did not favor an attack (IX.36–37).[25]

Now Socrates' argument that generalship must rule divination does not eliminate the possibility that divination can provide useful information to generals. Indeed, his concession to divination underlines not only the limits of generalship but the desirability of securing as much assistance as one can. Socrates insists in the name of the law, though, that generals must rule diviners. The law treats the information that divination can provide as limited in relation to what generalship knows; otherwise, it would make sense for diviners to rule generals.[26] When Socrates asks Laches whether or not he agrees with him, Laches replies that he does (199a). Surprisingly, Socrates solicits the agreement of Laches rather than Nicias here. He may suspect that Nicias is not prepared to subordinate divination so completely to generalship.[27] After all, Nicias earlier gave diviners credit for a great deal of knowledge; although he denied that they could know whether it was good or bad for events to turn out a certain way, he indicated that he at least believed that they could know how events would turn out (recall 195e–196a). But whatever Nicias' opinion of how generalship and divination should be ordered, Socrates' loud assertion of his and Laches' agreement that the general should rule the diviner certainly reminds Nicias, if he needed reminding, of just how much information the ordinary general lacks.

This "reminder" seems intended by Socrates to be the first stage of a two-part strategy to make Nicias realize the gravity of the implications of his account of courage. The second stage is his deduction, from Nicias' account of courage, that the courageous man does not need piety (or any virtue other than courage, which in this account is comprehensive knowledge). It is upon seeing that his definition of courage destroys the notion of virtue as parts that Nicias refuses to proceed any further; he simply concedes that he and Socrates have not discovered what courage is (199e). That Nicias refuses to embrace the notion of courage as the whole of virtue after Socrates indicates that piety is not part of such virtue suggests that something in Socrates' refutation has reminded Nicias of piety's importance to him. By reminding Nicias through his discussion of generalship and divination of the limitations of practical wisdom, Socrates sets up Nicias' refusal to relinquish the notion of virtue as parts. Nicias turns out to be deeply attached to that part of virtue that is piety, which is only preserved in any traditional understanding if virtue is understood as parts rather than as wholly absorbed by knowledge.

If it is obvious that the practical science of generalship cannot guarantee success in war, it seems at least equally obvious that no practical science can give a general like Nicias himself the knowledge that Nicias suggested the courageous man possesses, including above all the knowledge of whether and when "it is profitable to die" (195d). It is but a short step from acknowledging the limits of practical science to embracing the notion of virtue as parts, for this notion preserves a traditional understanding of piety and courage. Piety remains important to Nicias precisely because the extensive knowledge outlined by Socrates falls short of what Nicias thinks is needed for courage; that knowledge does not include the ability to know the future. Piety affords a substitute for the knowledge of his own profit that he wants but cannot have. Only gods would seem able to ensure that Nicias' risks will turn out profitably for him. In the absence of perfect knowledge about how to avoid evils, Nicias may hope that by following the wishes of the gods, whom his piety and other virtues would please, he will be rewarded with their help and thereby manage both to avoid suffering and to provide himself with good things.[28] Much or even everything is at stake in Socrates' deduction that courage as Nicias "conceives" it obviates the need for piety.

But what exactly is the problem here? Does not Socrates suggest that courage as knowledge *includes* knowledge of how to act toward the gods? Socrates says that the man who possesses the whole of virtue can guard against terrible things and provide himself with good things, as regards "both gods and human beings." Why, then, does Socrates' account of the courageous man with complete virtue lead Nicias to disavow his definition of courage and retreat to the view that virtue has parts? The answer seems to lie in what we have seen is Nicias' hope that suffering evils can be profitable—perhaps through a gift bestowed by the gods. Although Socrates' description of the man with complete virtue may suggest that such a man can secure divine assistance, in fact it suggests at least as much that he cannot. For knowing how to associate correctly with the gods is different from being worthy of their care. If the man with complete virtue knew how to behave to secure the gods' favor, he might well undermine his chance of receiving that favor, for his behavior would be mercenary, intended to secure divine rewards—and hence unworthy of securing them. To the extent that Socrates has made Nicias aware of what it is he hopes gods can grant, he has also made him aware that he cannot pursue those goods directly; gods do not yield to such blatant attempts to manipulate them. Do they not love those who are devoted to them, who heed their wishes without demanding rewards?[29] To state this differently, even if complete virtue is possible, it can carry Nicias only so far. Since knowledge cannot enable Nicias to secure his good, especially after death, he needs divine as-

sistance. That assistance, however, may not be forthcoming if he acts simply with a view to his own profit, no matter how knowledgeable. Courage as traditionally understood—as a part of virtue, with its terrible risks and all, appeals to Nicias precisely because those risks may make such assistance forthcoming. Precisely because Nicias wants even his death to be profitable, he must turn away from the knowledge that seemed the means of attaining it.[30] The very reason for his hyperrational account of courage—his fear for his own welfare—leads him to turn away from rationalism.

He does not know, however, precisely in what other direction to turn. He concludes from the impasse into which Socrates leads him that they have not found out what courage is, and he announces his intention to clarify matters later "both with Damon and others" (199e–200b). It is not clear whether he will use as the starting point for future analysis Socrates' depiction of the man who possesses courageous knowledge. In that depiction lies the beginning of a more coherent understanding of courage than Nicias here recognizes. Socrates, we noted, speaks of a scientific knowledge of all goods and evils in all conditions that enables the courageous man "to be thoroughly on his guard for the terrible things and for those that are not, and to provide himself with the good things" (199d–e). He does *not* say that this knowledge can prevent all evil outcomes and ensure only good ones. Regarding the former, Socrates says only that the knowledgeably courageous man is "*on guard*" for them and that he is well prepared for potential evils; some of these he will be unable to avoid.[31] If there exists the kind of knowledge of goods and evils that Socrates outlines, it is easier to see how courage could be a kind of knowledge. If one knew what was truly good and terrible for oneself and also that one may not always be able to avoid the latter, that the available options appeared bleak would not prevent one from bravely choosing the best among them.

Of course, we might question the correctness of taking one's own true good as the standard for determining correct action. But to the extent that Socrates selects such a standard, he does not do so arbitrarily. It grows out of the implicit conclusion of his conversation with Laches concerning the nobility of courage. As we have seen, we learn from that exchange that courage is only coherently noble not merely to the extent that it looks to others' good but also to the extent that its exercise is in some way good for the health of one's own soul.

What is additionally perplexing about Socrates' account of courageous knowledge is that it describes more than its possessor's attitude toward things that inspire fear, the domain with which one normally associates courage. Socrates says that the courageous man is on guard not only for terrible things but also for

"those that are *not*." Why in the world would one need to be "on guard" for what is not terrible? Let us recall that Socrates spoke earlier, with Nicias' assent, of things that do not cause fear as "emboldening" (198b–c).[32] To be on guard against what is not terrible is thus to be on guard against emboldening things, which means that he thinks such things constitute a threat from which we must defend ourselves. But how do emboldening things threaten us? As we have seen, emboldening things are connected to hope, and hope can bewitch us or lull us into a false sense of security (see *Republic* 413b–d), making us think that we are somehow protected against evils. Insofar as this situation undermines our self-reliance and our capacity to act with clear judgment, it may reasonably be said that we should guard against it. Failure to do so sufficiently may incline us to expect assistance from external powers rather than to use our own abilities to their fullest to do what is best in the circumstances (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1383b5–10). One with complete virtue, then, guards against emboldening things lest he slip into thinking that he can depend unreasonably on external assistance.

The man who knows what is good and bad and who is therefore on guard against both terrible things and (unreasonably) emboldening things thus neither expects always to avoid evils nor fails to do all he reasonably can to avoid them. His possession of complete virtue may not offer all the security Nicias wants, but does it not fulfill Nicias' demand that courage be good for the courageous man? Indeed, although it is oriented by the concern to "provide [one]self with the good things," it retains something of the character of the courage Laches admires—though, admittedly, not enough to satisfy him (cf. Vlastos 1981, 267). The man who possesses it will have to act in the face of uncertainty; at times he will have to act as best he can under the circumstances in full cognizance of the possibility that he may meet with a terrible fate, but his awareness of what is best in the circumstances enables him to act well.[33] His knowledgeable self-reliance—his reliance on nothing beyond himself—lessens the effects of fear on him. He is less vulnerable or perhaps even invulnerable to the hopes for external assistance that obscure from human beings their own capacities and thereby magnify their fears, even to the point of paralysis. He is better able to secure goods that are within his grasp rather than lose them by awaiting rescue.

Nicias illustrates the latter phenomenon, as he eventually loses the chance to extricate himself and his army from Sicily because of his superstitious concern with a lunar eclipse. Nicias' hopes incapacitate him in the Sicilian crisis, where he must choose the lesser of two evils, ignominious withdrawal, over the greater, the likely destruction of his forces (Thucydides, VII.47–48). Although Thucydides attributes Nicias' decision not to withdraw in part to his preference to die,

if he must, "privately" at the hands of the enemy rather than publicly at the hands of a punitive Athenian people, Thucydides also indicates that Nicias hopes that he will not have to die at all because the enemy forces are in fact much worse off than they are themselves (VII.48; cf. Orwin 1994, 121–22, and Edmunds 1975, 136–37). His desperate hope to avoid choosing between death at home and death abroad clouds his understanding of the predicament he and his army face. He hopes, despite all reasonable indications, that something good can come out of his situation. This makes him particularly vulnerable to soothsayers, who counsel delaying the Athenian withdrawal "thrice nine days" because of the lunar eclipse (VII.50), and this leads to the utter destruction of the Athenian army and ultimately to Nicias' own death (VII.85–86).[34] Had he recognized that at times evils cannot be avoided, he might have arrived at a less disastrous solution to the Sicilian crisis. There is a direct and obvious link between the solution he did choose and the demand we see from him in the *Laches* for a courageous knowledge that can protect us from all evils.

Indeed, Nicias' conversation with Socrates suggests that his encounter with Socrates drove him from a calculating rationalism to a calculating irrationalism and made him especially vulnerable to superstition. Nicias begins this dialogue as an admirer of both courage and reason. But by uncovering for Nicias what is implied in his exceedingly rational account of courage—his wish both to be courageous and to avoid a terrible fate—Socrates leads him to turn away from his calculating rationalism. Rather than revise his understanding of courage and what it demands, Nicias gives up on knowledge as what makes courage choiceworthy and retreats to the view of virtue as parts. Indeed, Nicias retreats from knowledge to a position where ignorance is necessary, that is, where acts can be courageous only when the actor performing them fully recognizes that he cannot know the acts will benefit him. Only then can he hope that the gods will look favorably on his virtue.

But the very reason that Nicias retreats from rationalism exonerates Socrates for the effect he may have had on Nicias. Nicias is unwilling to revise his understanding of courage in light of what he learns from Socrates because that understanding gives him hope of an absolute freedom from evils. To understand what Nicias is unprepared to consider, we recall that the man with complete virtue guards against or is well prepared for evils, some of which he will be unable to avoid. If the most one can know is what evils to guard against or prepare for, he who recognizes this must accept that virtuous action may entail something different from what Nicias expects of the courageous man. Or, insofar as complete virtue leads to the same actions as those to which Nicias expects it to lead,

it does so on different grounds. In other words, it isn't that the man of complete virtue faces evils knowing how to make them turn out profitably; rather, he does so in the full knowledge that when he faces an evil, he faces the best among bleak alternatives.

Of course, to entertain this possibility and its implications is by no means an easy task. The knowledge that is courage, which guards against emboldening as well as terrible things may well require some sub- or quasi-rational quality that aids one in acquiring the wisdom that makes courage possible. For it requires a certain toughness to accept that not all evils are avoidable. Indeed, Socrates seems to have been pointing to this quality when he focused attention on the possibility that a kind of courage exists in animals. Some human version of the natural strength and capacity for tenacious pursuit that is characteristic of certain animals may be crucially necessary for acquiring the knowledge that Socrates suggests is needed to be "on guard for terrible and emboldening things."[35] But by refusing to clarify his understanding of virtue—why he is dissatisfied with Socrates' elaboration of his definition of courage and why he remains attached to the view of virtue as parts—Nicias gives evidence that he lacks just this toughness. And this lack taints his piety; his awareness of and even preoccupation with the evils he faces makes him vulnerable to superstition and diviners. To say this is, then, in some measure to answer the riddle posed by the dialogue as to why virtue, even if it is partly knowledge, may not be teachable (189e–90a; see also *Protagoras* 361a–c). In addition to knowledge, courage seems to require a simple, natural toughness to undergird both our judgments about what is best to do and our understanding that we may be able to rely only on ourselves.

COURAGEOUS KNOWLEDGE

We began this chapter by asking how courage could be sensibly understood as a kind of knowledge. Although neither of them sees this himself, both Laches and Nicias in fact define courage as a *limited* knowledge. Despite Laches' strong inclination toward the view that courage is something noble and that it should therefore be an end in itself rather than a means to some other end, he is unwilling to accept the implication of this view that courage could include foolish steadfastness. On the one hand, Laches remains uncomfortable calling courage prudent steadfastness because doing so seems to make courage a means to some further end and thereby to undermine its splendid character. Yet he remains irredeemably uncomfortable with equating what he thinks is noble (courage) with what he thinks is shameful (foolishness). So Laches believes that knowledge has

something important to do with courage, even if he cannot articulate the precise connection between the two. For his part, Nicias finds himself facing two unpalatable options. If courage is a virtue, then for Nicias it must involve knowledge of what is good for the courageous individual, but he ultimately balks at identifying courage with what he thinks is the complete knowledge he desires (and therefore ultimately balks at identifying it with knowledge *per se*). Courage can be only a limited knowledge.

Socrates' own description of courage as a kind of knowledge offers a tantalizing solution to these quandaries, and there is much to say for it as a solution, since it both emerges from and responds to their fundamental opinion about courage. As we have seen, both Laches and Nicias at bottom believe that if courage is a virtue, it must be good in some way for the courageous individual. Neither, however, can say satisfactorily *how* it is good. Socrates' account addresses precisely this question. If there is a knowledge that enables one to guard against terrible things, possessing it would presumably allow one to act as well as possible in the face of terrible things. Still, what does it mean to act as well as possible? The question remains whether knowledge alone suffices to allow one to face terrible things well. The exchange between Laches and Socrates regarding the proper understanding of nobility suggests an answer to this difficulty. If, as we saw, nobility must ultimately be understood as the supreme good of one's own soul, then acting nobly or acting well must ultimately mean doing what is supremely best for oneself. If one *really* knew the actions that were in the deepest and fullest sense best for oneself, that knowledge would seem sufficient to enable one always to act well in the face of terrible and painful things. This, of course, is no small degree of knowledge.

On the other hand, this knowledge is limited in that it cannot provide everything for which human beings might wish. Looking to the courageous individual's good, it does not provide the nobility that Laches seeks in conceiving of courage as an end. And because it can never include all relevant information about all particulars, this knowledge cannot provide the security on which Nicias focuses. Thus, the understanding of courage suggested by Socrates requires gaining clarity about the true nobility of courage *and* about the limits with which we are inevitably and unalterably faced; Socrates' exchanges with Laches and Nicias indicate that such clarity is enormously difficult to achieve. For Laches and Nicias, there is too much at stake for them to confront the difficulties inherent in their definitions that would be a first step in gaining clarity on these crucial issues.

If courage is, or is something like, the knowledge Socrates describes, the *Laches* has suggested that it is also different from or depends on something other

than knowledge. The knowledge in question may improve our ability to deal with evils confronting us by preventing our judgment from being clouded by illusory hopes. But even if one could know what is best for oneself in the face of terrible things, this may be only the least of possible evils rather than anything profitable. Socrates has indicated that knowledge can lessen, if not completely eliminate, our fears. But knowing that it is not always possible to avoid suffering some evil may not completely eliminate our fears because it does not tell us when we might have to suffer that evil; insofar as we remain uncertain about the future, we may still have fears concerning it. The limited nature of that knowledge may still leave us vulnerable to fears, which, as we have said, suggests that something in addition to knowledge—something Socrates perhaps indicates by referring to bestial courage—may be a necessary supplement to knowledge in the courageous individual. A basic strength or toughness may be required to hold onto judgments about what is best or to prevent illusions from arising that would distort those judgments (see *Republic* 412e–13c).

Some such quality may well be necessary for the acquisition of the knowledge needed for full-blown courage.[36] Indeed, the deficiencies in the definitions presented by both Laches and Nicias may result in part from their lack of a basic natural strength. Having each had his definition of courage revealed to be inadequate, neither Laches nor Nicias seems eager to meet and talk with Socrates again. Nicias claims that he will sort out his difficulties later with the sophist Damon, and Laches merely encourages the fathers to hold onto Socrates as a teacher for their sons, implying that it is the boys rather than he or the other men who need further guidance. Their attitudes may well stem from their unexamined hopes for courage. Nicias hopes for too much from courage and virtue to consider seriously the possibility that the best that courage can do is to enable one to be "on guard." Laches resists acknowledging the role of courage in attaining further goods because of a deep and not fully conscious hope that a noble courage, with all the splendid sacrifices it implies, can constitute the peak of life. Both Laches and Nicias lack the natural toughness or hardiness of soul necessary to confront the problematic character of these hopes. The crucial role of a natural strength in gaining clarity about courage helps to explain Socrates' equivocation on the teachability of virtue in the first part of the dialogue. Virtue may depend on acquiring knowledge, but that knowledge in turn may depend first on having the right raw material. Knowledge can thus transform an essential natural strength or toughness into courage.

To say, however, that natural strength is necessary for courage is not to describe it; the *Laches* can hardly be said to explore its character. Is it the steadfast-

ness of soul that Laches calls courage? And is it the same in everyone who faces something fearful or dangerous? Is it, for example, the same in the wise individual who knows that in confronting rather than fleeing something bad he does what is truly best in the circumstances and in the person who does the same because he believes that what he is doing is courageous but cannot say why courage is choiceworthy? What is missing from the *Laches* is an exploration of this psychological substratum of courage. In the *Republic,* Socrates famously presents as the basis or seat of courage in the soul a quality he calls "spiritedness" (*thumos*), which makes one "fearless and invincible in the face of everything" (375b). Is steadfastness the same as spiritedness? It is unclear since spiritedness is never mentioned in the *Laches.*

If, however, Socrates claims in the *Republic* that spiritedness is intimately connected to courage, why is it not discussed in the *Laches,* the dialogue most explicitly devoted to courage? Angela Hobbs also discusses the absence of spiritedness from the *Laches* and argues that this shows that the two dialogues offer different accounts of courage.[37] While Hobbs's argument is plausible, before making recourse to it we must consider whether there might be something about the *Laches* that makes it less suited than the *Republic* for a discussion of spiritedness. Spiritedness is the part of the soul, according to Socrates, that becomes angry and indignant (*Republic* 440a–d), that is, it is particularly concerned with injustice. Indeed, it is in large part the anger and indignation at injustice that, as we will see, makes one "fearless and invincible in the face of everything" and often leads us to put ourselves in danger or to ignore overwhelming odds. Spiritedness is that quality, then, that makes us forget about ourselves and our own good, principally in the service of justice. It is thus an emphatically political phenomenon, and the *Republic* is perhaps Plato's most political book, as its whole premise is ostensibly the construction of the best, most just political order. The courage it describes is thus a courage oriented toward the good of that order.

The *Laches,* by contrast, is a much less political work. Although its main interlocutors are emphatically political men, neither has a particularly political definition of courage. Both Laches and Nicias are concerned above all with what courage means for the courageous man himself. Spiritedness is less relevant here because politics is less relevant here, and the conversation is thus conducted in something of a political vacuum. The discussion in the *Republic* is a crucial supplement, then, to the discussion in the *Laches,* since its premise—the possibility of a perfectly just political order—implicitly questions the perspective of the *Laches* by offering an alternative to the self-regarding character of courage that we have seen emerge in the latter.

As we will see, spiritedness is very important part of the education in courage described in the *Republic*. But as we will also see in the *Republic,* spiritedness is extremely complex. In turning to the treatment of courage there, we are immediately confronted with a puzzle. The spirited courage Socrates describes in the *Republic* is at odds with wisdom. We see this more clearly when we consider that, however important a condition for courage spiritedness may be, spiritedness seems also to be an obstacle to it, at least insofar as courage depends upon or is a kind of knowledge. As we have said, Socrates mentions that the spirited part of the soul is the part that becomes angry and indignant (440a–d). Anger, the most vivid manifestation of spiritedness, is much more likely to blind us to wisdom than to help us acquire it. We see a good example of the anti-rational tendencies of anger in Laches. As he becomes angry with what he takes to be Nicias' dishonest (196b1–3) and insulting (197c3–5) comments, he becomes less and less inclined to remain a part of the conversation. His anger at Nicias makes him sure that even if he himself has not been able to define courage adequately, he has nothing to learn from Nicias. His anger ultimately leads him to give up on the question at hand (196a5–c1, 200c–d). How, then, can something as irrational as spiritedness either help one acquire the knowledge that is courage or coexist with such knowledge in a rational soul?

In turning to the *Republic,* we will try to gain a better understanding of this subrational aspect of courage and its connection to whatever might be properly called courage. We will focus on one of the central characters in the *Republic,* Glaucon, who Socrates says is "always most courageous (*andreiotatos*) in everything" (357a). In Glaucon we find an interesting combination of the concerns of Laches and Nicias, for, like Laches, Glaucon is attracted to a notion of virtue understood as the peak of life, and, like Nicias, Glaucon is self-conscious about the need for virtue to bring him personal happiness.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Nature of Spiritedness

THE ROLE OF SPIRITEDNESS IN THE REPUBLIC

An inquiry into what the *Republic* has to teach about the relationship between spiritedness and courage must not overlook that this teaching is not the dialogue's primary theme.[1] That theme is justice. The bulk of the conversation reported in the *Republic* deals with the efforts of Socrates and two young companions to construct a city in speech in order to illuminate the nature of justice. Socrates embarks on this project in order to defend justice against powerful arguments that two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, level against it. Neither of them is an enemy of justice—far from it. Rather, they are dissatisfied with justice as they have heard it discussed; they know of no compelling argument that shows justice to be truly good for its possessors. They announce their dissatisfaction at the beginning of Book II of the *Republic,* having just heard Socrates in Book I argue against the sophist Thrasymachus' attacks on justice. Or, rather, they have heard Socrates silence him. As far as they are concerned, Socrates has merely proven to be a better sophist than Thrasymachus; even though he has outmaneuvered Thrasymachus, he has not offered what they consider a persuasive defense of justice (see 358b). The boys therefore challenge Socrates to offer a better defense in light of the considerations that they raise.

Glaucon presents the stronger challenge. Whereas Adeimantus explains why he is dissatisfied with traditional defenses offered on behalf of justice (362e), Glaucon goes on the offensive. He presents a compelling and justifiably famous attack on justice, which he claims to have learned from the sophists (358c). He

first contends that justice is merely a contract offered by the weak to persuade the strong, who could otherwise commit successful injustice, to abide by the city's laws and concern themselves with others' good (358e–60d). In fact, Glaucon suggests, if both a just and an unjust man possessed the ring of Gyges, which, according to legend, can make one invisible, both would embrace injustice. For injustice is the best means for human beings to get the good things they want, such as money, sex, and power, and the only thing that prevents them from acting unjustly so as to get these things is the fear of punishment. By making their injustice impossible to detect, invisibility takes away their fear and liberates them to acquire what they desire without regard for justice. Ultimately, Glaucon demands that Socrates show that justice is choiceworthy even in the direst of circumstances in order to prove that it is choiceworthy at all. He wants Socrates to show that justice is an end in itself, so desirable that one should choose it even if everyone else believes him to be unjust and inflicts terrible punishments such as crucifixion on him (360e–62c).

Amazed both by the power of Glaucon's and Adeimantus' arguments and by the persistence of their concern for justice, Socrates agrees to defend justice as much as he can (368b), and in order to do so he enlists their assistance in constructing a city in speech. The professed rationale for this project is the claim that the city can serve as a model for the individual soul. Insofar as the city is analogous to the soul, Socrates asserts that by finding justice in the former, they will be able to discover what justice is and what power it has in the latter (368e–69a). In collaboration at first only with the more moderate Adeimantus, Socrates describes a city that comes into being to supply its members' economic needs. The cause of the city's coming into being is that individuals need assistance from each other because no one can fend entirely for himself. Moreover, to ensure that all these needs are not only satisfied but satisfied in the best way possible, each man specializes in a particular art. So that the city may be adequately supplied, there must be many different kinds of artisans, including not only those who make goods but also those who trade them. That only economic needs are addressed here is manifested by Socrates' comment that the city has grown to "completeness" or is "perfect" (371e10) before he ever mentions the family (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* I.2).

Socrates thus constructs a city in which there are no complicating attachments, in which the city satisfies all basic needs, and thus in which there is a perfect congruence of interests between the city and its citizens. As Adeimantus notes, it is not even clear whether there is justice and injustice in the city (372a); because of the easy harmony and cooperation, there seems to be no reason for in-

justice and hence no need for justice. But there is a certain sense—albeit a strange sense—in which we may say justice exists here. Among the various meanings of justice is the perfect congruence of interests, a genuine common good, where in looking to the good of the city, one's own true good is also advanced (cf. 443d–e). In this case, justice would be defensible as good and therefore as rationally choiceworthy; the exercise of courage would be genuinely best both for the city and for the courageous individual. Socrates' first city (or "true city," 372e6), where justice is rational, is important, for, as we will see, it establishes a standard that guides Socrates' subsequent proposals. Thus, while justice rather than courage is the dialogue's primary theme, the defense of justice that Socrates elaborates here contains a defense of courage too—a courage that is rationally choiceworthy and hence truly a virtue.

Even if it is not the dialogue's primary theme, courage and especially the phenomenon Socrates calls *thumos* or "spiritedness"[2] play important roles in the city in speech. But what is "spiritedness," and what is its relation to courage? First and most simply, spiritedness is essential to the city's soldiers, who, according to Socrates, must be spirited if they are to be courageous.[3] These soldiers do not simply defend the city; they also enforce its laws, which in this city issue from Socrates' most famous creation: the philosopher-kings. The spirited and courageous warriors of this city are thus the helpmates of *rational* laws. And they receive an education that aims in part to transform their spiritedness into a certain sort of courage, and it is from them that the philosopher-kings, that is, the most rational citizens, are drawn. These facts suggest not only that spiritedness and courage are fundamental to the functioning of this particular regime but also that both have some connection to the full development of reason.

There is, however, a problem with the role that spiritedness is to play: spiritedness is not rational. Socrates claims that because spiritedness makes a soul "fearless and invincible in the face of everything," it is what makes one "willing to be courageous" (375a–b).[4] Spiritedness thus first comes to sight as the substratum of courage. More precisely, it first comes to sight as the substratum of *soldiers'* courage, for Socrates first mentions it as the quality needed by the soldiers of the city in speech if they are to defend the city (375a–b).[5] This may suggest that spiritedness is the substratum not of courage *per se* but of a particular *kind* of courage. But if this is true, we should note that it is a kind that every city needs because every city needs courageous soldiers to defend it. Even if spiritedness were the source only of military courage, it thus would appear to be indispensable to any regime.

That every city needs spirited courage, however, does not make that courage unproblematic. Socrates worries that spirited soldiers will be "savage to one an-

other and the rest of the citizens" (375b). Raw spiritedness is thus as much of a threat as a benefit to the city, which suggests that the raw courage to which it gives rise is not a politically responsible courage. Partly for this reason, Socrates spends almost two full books of the *Republic* outlining an educational program designed to refine the savage character of spiritedness. Only if it is properly cultivated, we learn, can spiritedness produce "political courage" (430c). Yet even political courage is not, according to Socrates, the best kind of courage. He indicates later in the *Republic* that there is a "finer" kind (430c; cf. 430b with 442c). This finer kind seems to be the courage that Socrates says is possessed by philosophic natures (486b, 487a, 491b; cf. 517b–c and 520b–c), who, Socrates suggests, need some sort of courage to become philosophers in the first place (503a–4a, 535a–b). This could be taken to imply that the cultivation of spiritedness can yield two sorts of courage, the political and the philosophic.

But the relationship between the spirited courage of warriors and the courage needed or manifested by philosophers is by no means clear. Since, as we have seen, the fearless and even savage character of spiritedness seems to be at odds with reason, it is hard to see what, if any, role spiritedness has in the soul of those who are distinguished by their rationality. Philosophers certainly do not come to sight as spirited individuals (see especially 475c, 485aff, 488d–e, 496a–e, 536c). Moreover, how can we reconcile the notion that courage emanates from the spirited part of the soul with the argument suggested by the *Laches* that genuine courage depends upon a clear-sighted understanding of the truly good and terrible? To answer such questions, we will begin by investigating the phenomenon of spiritedness and its connection to courage. This will prepare us to understand the connection between political and philosophic courage as well as Socrates' indication that the latter is finer than the former.

SPIRITEDNESS, ANGER, AND JUSTICE

If spiritedness is a necessary condition for and perhaps a component of courage, it is not itself courage. Everyone recognizes that human beings at times act out of spiritedness without thereby acting courageously. Indeed, Socrates' leading example of spiritedness is not courage but anger. The man who trips over a chair and then kicks it throws a fit of spirited anger, but he does not act courageously. There is an obvious reason for this: in confronting the chair he has not confronted anything frightening. But Socrates points to a deeper and more important reason for distinguishing between spiritedness and courage. As we noted, Socrates says that spiritedness is what makes one "willing to be coura-

geous," since it is "irresistible and unbeatable" and "its presence makes every soul fearless and invincible in the face of everything" (375a–b). These words suggest that spiritedness makes one "willing" to be courageous because it fills the soul with a sense of "invincible" power. That is, it makes one "willing" to be courageous not by persuading one to act in the face of fears and doubts but by silencing them. Spiritedness thus does not appeal to reason but rather blinds it; if only because courage requires recognition of the dangers one faces, spiritedness cannot be the same as courage.

Moreover, insofar as we think of courage as a virtue and therefore as something good, we have another, if perhaps more debatable, reason for distinguishing between spiritedness and courage: it is not always good to be "fearless" or to think oneself "invincible" in the face of everything. As we have seen, and as Laches acknowledges, because it is foolish to dive into wells without knowing how to swim, it is hard to call such an act courageous; the point does not change if spiritedness is the source of one's folly. Consider the small man with great spiritedness who becomes so filled with anger that he challenges or attacks someone far bigger and stronger than he. There are two possible reasons why we might deny courage to him: either because spiritedness has so inflamed him that he does not realize what he is doing or because it so inflames him that he does not care. It makes him so preoccupied with the object of his anger that it either crowds out all other thoughts or clouds his judgment.[6]

This example also suggests why Socrates speaks of spiritedness as making one only "willing" to be courageous rather than as simply making one so by itself. The actions that spiritedness inspires may well appear to be courageous. The Davids who attack Goliaths not from a distance with a slingshot but from up close do strike most people as brave. If, however, their actions really stem from spiritedness, people may not view them as brave for long. The boy who stands up to a bully in full awareness of the potential consequences for him seems braver than the one who lashes out because of his quick temper. We typically consider courageous those who are in control of their actions rather than those who are out of control. The latter may perform actions resembling those that reflect courage, but they are not really courageous. They may be *willing* to be courageous, but insofar as spiritedness blinds them, they are not truly courageous.

Spiritedness, in short, comes to sight as the fuel of courage rather than as courage itself because it is not rational.[7] In fact, Socrates highlights the subrational character of spiritedness at its first mention by suggesting that animals possess it; he speaks of spiritedness as making a "horse or dog or any other animal" willing to be courageous (375a–b; see also 441a–b). Even Socrates' suggestion that spiritedness

could mitigate the soldiers' tendency to savagery illustrates its tension with reason (376a–c). Socrates suggests that the example of dogs, who are fierce with outsiders but gentle to their own, indicates that a spirited nature can even be the source of gentleness in the soldiers toward their fellow citizens. But as we see with dogs, spiritedness makes one gentle to one's own because our own are familiar to us, not because we know they are good. Indeed, it is spiritedness that leads us to conflate the two; our love of our own derives its intensity from the belief that our own things or people are good. From its first mention in the dialogue, then, we learn why spiritedness needs to be educated: it must be brought under reason's control. As Socrates says later in the dialogue, one's soul is courageous *only* if its spirited part is rightly trained, by which he means that we learn to guide it by reason (410d6–7).

Before we can know how spiritedness can be rightly trained, we have to understand its full character. While it is fairly easy to see that spiritedness is distinct from reason, it is harder to see how it is similarly distinct from desire, thus constituting, according to Socrates' treatment in Book IV, a third part of the soul. In order to demonstrate this to a dubious Glaucon, Socrates asks him whether spiritedness can be found in either the reasoning or the desiring part of the soul. Glaucon is not sure, but he suggests that it belongs to the latter (439e). To persuade him otherwise, Socrates recounts the story of Leontius. When Leontius one day happened upon the corpses of some executed criminals, one part of him wanted to look at their dead bodies while another part thought that it was shameful to do so. When he could no longer restrain himself from looking, he cursed his eyes for compelling him to gaze at the corpses (439e–40b). The cause, Socrates says, is that his spiritedness was roused against the part of himself that he believed to be worse, the desiring part. Socrates thus argues that anger can oppose desire, which helps to persuade Glaucon at least that spiritedness does indeed belong to a separate part of the soul.

Glaucon's first instinct about spiritedness, though, is far from crazy. One might wonder whether what opposed Leontius' desire to look—or the desire he attributes to his eyes—was in fact not something distinct from desire but rather a countervailing desire to avoid shameful behavior. Indeed, Thomas Aquinas treats anger as a kind of desire (1964, I.Q.81.A.2). According to Thomas, there are two kinds of desires: concupiscible and irascible. Concupiscible desires are simple; they consist of our movement either directly toward something good, as in the case of love and joy, or directly away from something bad, as in the case of hatred and sorrow (cf. I.2.Q.23, A.2). Irascible desires arise in response to the presence of some obstacle either to acquiring something good or fleeing something bad; the irascible desire's "object is the difficult, for it tends to overcome

and rise above threats" (I.Q.81.A.2). Anger falls into this category. Now Thomas maintains that the irascible desires, like anger, differ from the concupiscible ones because the irascible desires can sometimes cross them; the irascible desires, for example, may lead one to submit to something painful from which the concupiscible desires counsel flight. Still, this obviously departs from Socrates' presentation; Thomas calls anger a desire, whereas Socrates does not. Thomas, moreover, indicates not just that anger is a kind of desire but also that it is rooted in ordinary concupiscible desires when he claims that all the irascible desires "start from and finish with the concupiscible ones." They seem to be helpmates of the concupiscible desires because they help one to overcome what stands between the simple desires and the objects they seek. The irascible desires according to Thomas are derivative, not independent.[8]

Socrates' account of anger, by contrast, treats it as independent. He suggests that spiritedness cannot be adequately explained either as a simple response to thwarted desire or as something that helps thwarted desires to obtain their objects. When he describes the phenomenon of anger, he says that a man's spirit "boils and becomes harsh" when he believes that he has suffered some injustice (440c). According to Socrates' formulation, one does not become angry whenever *any* desire is thwarted. Something more is involved: a sense that an injustice has been done. And Socrates' account makes sense, since our anger at having been crossed or harmed tends to dissipate when we understand that harm not to have been inflicted unjustly. Consider, for example, how much our anger would dissipate if we were to discover that the individual who had rear-ended our car had done so not because he had been driving recklessly but because he had suffered a heart attack. Socrates puts it this way: the noble individual is "less capable of anger at suffering hunger, cold or anything else of the sort inflicted on him by one whom he supposes does so justly" (440c). Both our anger and the concomitant desire to lash out at whomever or whatever has made us angry are intimately connected to our belief that we have been treated unjustly. We both assign and accept punishment, Socrates suggests, only as long as we believe that the offender (including ourselves) has acted unjustly.

To speak of anger as the response to thwarted desire, then, simply does not capture the connection between anger and justice. Thomas' account of anger as an irascible desire also obscures another component of anger—namely, that anger is no mere means to the satisfaction of the concupiscible desires but rather a force with its own agenda. Socrates says that the angry spirit will suffer "hunger, cold and everything of the sort" and "stand firm and conquer and not cease from its noble efforts before it has succeeded, or death intervenes"

(440c–d). Even if individuals become angry because their concupiscible desires are thwarted, they often lose sight of what they originally wanted. If someone believes that an opponent has unjustly deprived him of something, he is usually not satisfied if the opponent merely yields the object in question; he demands that the opponent acknowledge his injustice and apologize. It is not uncommon for people to spend more in a court battle than the thing over which they are fighting is worth; they justify their behavior by saying that they are fighting for the sake of "principle." One thus can become so consumed with anger that one *forgets* about one's initial desire. Indeed, according to Socrates' statement that anger makes one willing to fight on until death, anger can subordinate the preservation of life to the satisfaction of its goals.[9]

Anger thus reveals that spiritedness, at least as it is manifest in human beings, is fundamentally moral. One might object to this claim on the grounds that when Socrates first mentions spiritedness, as we have seen, he says that it makes animals as well as human beings willing to be courageous (375a–b). Does this not suggest that there is a kind of spiritedness that is not moral? One might characterize such spiritedness as a natural "fight" that arises when one confronts obstacles. There are strong reasons for doubting, however, that this amoral, animal-like quality is the focus of Socrates' discussion of spiritedness. First, that Socrates says that animals and human beings possess a similar quality does not mean that he thinks that it manifests itself identically in them. Second, examples of spiritedness other than anger that appear to exemplify amoral spiritedness turn out also contain moral opinions similar to those at the heart of anger. If one were to point to the spiritedness that any dedicated jogger summons in himself, for example, to keep running in a long, tough race, that "fight" often and perhaps always has a moral component, such as one's encouraging oneself by asserting that one is not the sort of human being who gives up.

Now, as we have seen, Socrates reveals that anger depends on the belief that we are being denied something to which we believe ourselves entitled. We therefore give reasons and explanations for our anger. We are not merely animals fiercely seeking what we desire; our anger, we believe, is justified.[10] And this explains why anger is always accompanied by blame and the wish to punish what inspires it. We are not simply disappointed when we do not get what we deserve; we *blame* others for our deprivation because we believe that they have an obligation to respect our rights and that they must be punished for violating their obligation. This belief can be so powerful that it sometimes even leads us irrationally to think that *objects* should be punished for harming us, as was shown by the case of Leontius, who cursed his eyes as though they were living, willful beings. Anger

is thus moral in that it implies a belief that we *deserve* certain treatment and that we can exert a claim upon others to recognize our deserts which, we believe, they are obliged to fulfill.

But what makes us think that we can exert such claims on others? And why, moreover, do we think that the world will—or at least should—support us in our demand that others abide by their duties? While the origin of these beliefs is murky, we can discern the more fundamental phenomenon that anger reveals. Socrates' treatment of anger suggests that we expect the world to be fundamentally just; we expect it to give us what we deserve. To be sure, we can be wrong about what we deserve. That an angry individual feels he is in the right certainly does not mean that he is in the right. And we can be angry without any reflection about why we deserve what we believe we do; even very young children demand to be treated justly. But the demand for just treatment is not wholly mysterious. It seems to be connected to how we, when our better selves are acting, treat others: we believe that we respect, or at least can respect, virtue in others. In other words, we believe that we are capable of acting with a view to something other than our own welfare. We are not merely obeying the law when we refrain from merely taking what we want when we can. However painful justice sometimes may be, human beings are often willingly just (cf. *Republic* 360d3), which suggests to us that there is a level of existence on which human beings wish to act not merely to advance their own interests but according to what is right. That we think we can live on that level leads us to think that others can and should, too, and that they deserve blame when they do not.

That we get angry at those who do not treat us as well as we think we deserve shows, of course, that we do not simply wish to live high-mindedly, according to principle, eschewing all other concerns; we are concerned for ourselves. To the extent that we do not receive proper respect, moreover, we hold more than simply the particular offender responsible. In fact, we think that we have a claim on the world more generally to rectify the situation—particularly by punishing whoever offended us. But our very demands that our virtue be respected and rewarded and that any lapse in this regard be punished suggests a difficulty with our attachment to such recognition. It suggests that this kind of respect is something we care about not because it is good for us but because it is *owed* us by others. But that belief is problematic. If we have acted as we think best, then we should not need recognition or reward; the action itself should be sufficient. If, however, we insist that the action is not worthwhile without the respect or recognition that we believe is due, we are admitting the action is not good in itself but requires a supplemental good. The difficulty of this position is deepened to the

extent that we understand ourselves to *deserve* recognition for having suffered to acquire it. If we have merely suffered to elicit something in return, then we are not really *deserving*; we have merely engaged in long-range calculation.

Now if the belief that we deserve recognition of our virtue (however minimal that virtue sometimes may be) is at the core of human spiritedness, then that belief conflicts with what we have seen is the understanding of courage discussed in the *Laches*. For this understanding, arrived at by confronting our initially confused opinions about nobility, is guided by the standard not of what we *deserve* but of what is truly good for us. Courage rooted in spiritedness, then, is more oriented toward public display and recognition than is the account of courage Socrates points to in the *Laches*; insofar as the former kind's goodness depends on the recognition of others, it is also less self-sufficient than the courage of the *Laches*. To say all this is still to *identify* rather than to *explain* the phenomenon. It is to identify what conduct we expect rather than to explain precisely why we feel that that conduct should be forthcoming. A full explanation would require an account of why others—or we ourselves—should act justly, and this would be the task of another investigation.[11] Here we must limit ourselves to noting that human anger depends on the belief in just deserts, that is, that we are beings who act in such a way as to deserve justice and that if justice is not forthcoming, we expect or have a claim on the world to rectify that fact. As the leading and most common example of spiritedness, anger has much to teach us about spiritedness. From Socrates' discussion we learn that at least in human beings its animating force is a deep and abiding concern with what we are owed and thus, more broadly, with our worthiness.

We learn more about the nature of that concern and thus about spiritedness in the role that Glaucon plays in the construction of the city in speech. In what follows, our focus will be on Glaucon rather than Adeimantus. The reason is that the present investigation is devoted to exploring the connection between spiritedness and courage, and however spirited and courageous Adeimantus is, it is Glaucon whom the dialogue explicitly presents as most embodying these qualities. Adeimantus himself attests to Glaucon's greater spiritedness. When Socrates in Book VIII describes the decay both of regimes and of the men whose souls correspond to their regimes, he identifies the regime that follows the best as honor-loving and "timocratic." Upon hearing that the timocratic regime is characterized by the prominence of spiritedness, Adeimantus remarks that the kind of man who corresponds to this regime would be "near to Glaucon here" (548e).

More important, Glaucon is the one who more provocatively compels us to grapple with questions about spiritedness and courage. As we shall soon see, it

is at Glaucon's insistence that the city in speech is forced to wage war and thus to incorporate soldiers and an education in courage into its way of life (373ff.). Indeed, the connection between Glaucon and courage is prefigured at the very beginning of Book II, as soon as the young men take over the conversation about justice from Thrasymachus. When Socrates remarks there that he has not yet been "freed from argument," he says that this is because Glaucon, whom he describes as "always most courageous in everything" (357a), will not let it go. Socrates' comment is compatible, moreover, with what we learn about Glaucon and his courage from his speech about justice, which presents a more extreme challenge than Adeimantus' speech does. Glaucon demands not only that justice be shown to be sensibly good, as Adeimantus does (see especially 366e–67a and 367d); he also demands that it be shown to be good for the just man even when justice is terribly hard, requiring the greatest sacrifices. Glaucon longs to hear an argument that defends justice as something for which it is worthwhile to endure the greatest risks. This suggests that Glaucon has a particularly high regard for courage as Laches understood it, namely, as the capacity for steadfastness of soul under terrifying conditions.

As we have seen, in Socrates' initial collaboration with Adeimantus, Socrates describes a city that comes into being to supply basic needs. We recall that the way of life in the first or "true" city is very basic. Its citizens, as Socrates describes them, are so moderate as to be unerotic and unspirited. They have no great longings and no need for law. The very absence of law testifies to the absence of any sources of conflict among the citizens and thus to the absence of spiritedness. The natural harmony and cooperation that reigns in this city and that precludes the need for justice and injustice (or limits it, as Socrates suggests, to "some need they have of each other") also keeps spiritedness out of the city. They enjoy very simple pleasures—bread, wine, clothing, and shoes; they work throughout the year; they eat simple, hearty food; and they relax by drinking wine and singing hymns to the gods. As Socrates says, while they enjoy "sweet intercourse," they avoid producing too many children so as to "keep an eye out against poverty and war" (372a–c).

On hearing this last statement, Glaucon sharply interrupts the narrative, claiming that Socrates and Adeimantus have made these men "have their feast without relishes" (372c); the erotic Glaucon is clearly frustrated by the mundane lives of these citizens. That he interrupts at this juncture suggests that he is especially frustrated by Socrates' portrait of these citizens both because they have dull, orderly sexual lives and because they eschew war. But Socrates interprets Glaucon's complaint literally; he responds by granting them a greater variety of

foods. This is hardly what Glaucon had in mind. He is dissatisfied; indeed, he seems angry. Dripping with sarcasm and disgust, Glaucon likens the city to a "city of sows" and implies that the citizens' lives consist of nothing more than getting fat. Glaucon then suggests that the citizens should instead be able to enjoy tables, couches, relishes, and desserts (372d). Both of Glaucon's interjections suggest that he rejects the first city because it does not satisfy his desire for luxuries, which include erotic (rather than procreative) sexual encounters and fine meals in comfortable surroundings. There are, however, strong indications that luxuries are not Glaucon's only, or even main, concern. As we shall see, luxuries would not suffice to satisfy Glaucon or to attach him to the city. After all, would he not feel a deeper attachment to wealthy Athens than his speech about justice suggests if his top priority were luxuries?

In response to Glaucon's objections to the city, Socrates asks him how the city "ought to be" (372d). Glaucon suggests that "as is conventional," the men in the city ought to have the things just mentioned: relishes and desserts and couches and tables. But the specific "relishes" Glaucon proposes are less important than why he proposes them. Comfortable furniture, after all, does not satisfy an appetite for erotic pleasures. Indeed, Glaucon does not propose including furniture in the city for the sake of the citizens' comfort or pleasure; he includes it because reclining on couches and eating from tables is proper for men "who are not wretched" (372d8–10).[12] Of all the possible things that Glaucon could ask that they include in this city of their own creation, he selects not interesting sources of pleasure but rather conventional trappings of wealth and leisure. Glaucon thus seems to care less about pleasure than about status and honor.[13]

Glaucon, then, is not merely dissatisfied with the first city's incapacity to supply him with a happiness he desires. He is *disgusted* by the first city, whose citizens, he indicates by calling them pigs, seem more bestial than human to him.[14] And his sarcastic dismissal of the city suggests that Socrates' description of their way of life offends his sense of what it means to be human. He evinces an angry repugnance at the presentation of human beings in what he regards as a degrading light and treats the whole picture with utter contempt. Glaucon does not merely think that men should live more pleasantly than they would in the first city; he thinks that they should live with honor and dignity. And in his articulation of "how it should be," Glaucon is groping for something that will make the city and its inhabitants into more than sows. But his particular additions to the city suggest that he is at a loss for what specifically that might be.

Exactly what disgusts Glaucon about the first citizens' lives is not obvious. What especially prompts this question is the fact that, at first, Glaucon seems

more to pity than to condemn the citizens. Glaucon initially objects to the city after Socrates' first description of its citizens' "manner of life"; after hearing how moderately they live, he protests that Socrates makes "these *men* have their feast without relishes." Later, after Socrates revises his account to give the citizens desserts like "figs and beans," Glaucon accuses him of providing for a "city of *sows*" (372a–d; emphasis added). It is in between these two descriptions that the citizens' way of life ceases in Glaucon's eyes to be worthy of human beings.

Socrates' revised account, however, seems hardly to differ from his first one, which also depicted the citizens as eating and drinking and engaging in moderate sex. What in the interim between the two accounts inspires Glaucon to suggest that Socrates is providing for a city of sows? It is Socrates' mention of death, which immediately precedes Glaucon's reference to sows. Socrates says that the citizens "will live out their lives in peace with health . . . and at last, dying as old men, they will hand down other similar lives to their offspring" (372d). Socrates' reference to death reminds Glaucon of his deep concern, which we will see is evident in his speech about justice, that human life involve more than satisfying the needs of the body. Death, for Glaucon, casts a palpable shadow over human life, lending a particular urgency to the desire for more than perpetuating the species and being fattened for worms. Because death seems to render human life insignificant, it drives Glaucon to wish to make—to leave—a mark on the world.[15] Socrates' mention of death brings to the surface, with particular force, Glaucon's desire to live a *serious* or virtuous life, which desire tempts him to make extraordinary demands on himself. Yet, however desirable that virtuous life is, it is also important to Glaucon that there be external recognition of it. Honor, including having the trappings that indicate one "is not wretched," looms large for Glaucon because it testifies to human beings' virtue and thereby to their seriousness despite the fate that seems to undermine all human significance.[16]

We saw a further example of Glaucon's concern with virtue and worthiness in his remarkable portraits of the just man and the unjust man. We see evidence of Glaucon's attraction to justice and courage when he acknowledges that there are some who, contrary to his earlier assertions, are *willingly* just (360d). Since we know from Socrates that Glaucon offers this whole attack on justice precisely because he wishes so passionately to see it defended (368a–b), we are led to think that Glaucon may here be referring to himself. He would like to be just and make the heroic sacrifices associated with being just. But while justice is the virtue that Glaucon most wants to see defended, he is also powerfully attracted to courage. This is evident from his use of courage to bolster his portrait of the unjust man. Glaucon thinks that the unjust man must possess the virtue of courage if he is to

come across as sufficiently admirable. When Glaucon describes justice as a compact among the weak to delude the strong into not pressing their advantages, he claims that no "real man" (359b2) would agree to the compact, even if he would suffer for rejecting it; he dismisses the possibility that the manly unjust man might simply choose to agree to the compact publicly but then secretly renege on his agreement. The real man, according to Glaucon, does not dissemble; he courageously gives his true word and sticks to it. Glaucon prefers the man who preserves his honor as a free and independent agent to the one who takes the easier path to injustice by pretending to acquiesce in the many's wishes.[17]

However powerful these passages reveal Glaucon's concern with honor and courage to be, Glaucon does not himself articulate this concern. Indeed, he may not even be conscious of his deepest concerns. Let us recall that his attempt to suggest alternatives to what he regards as the first city's animalistic way of life was rather feeble; all he could muster was the recommendation that the city have fine food and furniture. Glaucon wants a more meaningful life, perhaps a life that can be satisfying even despite the fact of death, but he is at a loss to articulate what it includes. He just knows that such a life cannot be found in the city of sows. His demand for luxuries may appear frivolous, but in fact it ushers uniquely human concerns into the city. And especially noteworthy for our purposes: the extent to which Glaucon's objection to the city and his wish for a more *human* life is rooted in a concern for honor and virtue—in a concern to be a certain kind of human being—is the extent to which it is a spirited objection.[18] Glaucon does not merely want happiness, he wants to be *worthy* of happiness, and this makes him attracted not just to pleasures but to principle, to justice, and to noble, self-sacrificing virtue. There is thus an intimate connection between Glaucon's *eros* and his spiritedness, since it is perhaps only through a honorable, noble life, understood as a life of self-overcoming virtue, that Glaucon can hope to become worthy of the happiness he desires.

Through Glaucon's objection, we thus see that spiritedness, which Socrates initially presents as a threat to the city's stability, has a positive as well as a negative dimension: it fuels aspirations toward greatness. Indeed, that the concern for justice and the honor that it demands is the animating concern of spiritedness makes it possible, when combined with *eros* or longing for happiness, for spiritedness to blossom into noble courage. An erotic nature expands the spirited concern for justice and honor so that spirited individuals will not only fiercely demand their just deserts but will also strive for great things; they wish not merely to receive honor but also to be worthy of it. If the erotic Glaucon longs for a sublimely fulfilling happiness, the spirited Glaucon thinks that happiness can be ob-

tained through self-overcoming and noble action. And it is this concern for his due recognition that furnishes him with the resoluteness, determination, and steeliness to do or suffer what is necessary in order to be worthy of the honor he thinks accompanies his self-overcoming virtue; as Socrates says, an aroused spirit will suffer "hunger, cold and everything of the sort" and "stand firm and conquer and not cease from its noble efforts before it has succeeded, or death intervenes" (440c–d). In natures where both are intensely present, eros and spiritedness can shape each other in a profoundly impressive way.

Socrates also highlights the noble potential of spiritedness when he describes spirited phenomena other than anger. He calls, for example, the loves of honor and of victory "spirited," and he describes the ascendant part of the "timocratic" man's soul, that is, the soul of the man characteristic of an honor-loving regime (548c), in similar terms.[19] The love of honor suggests, even more than Glaucon's objection to the city of sows, what is promising about spiritedness. About the spirited part of the soul, Socrates says that "it admires and honors" (553d4). Spiritedness looks up—and leads spirited human beings to try to resemble what they admire.[20] The spirited men of Socrates' timocratic regime admire and aim to be themselves admirable. They seek honor, which means they do not seek merely to win fame and its attendant benefits. They want respect and admiration from respectable and admirable people, who alone fully appreciate virtue.[21] Indeed, according to Aristotle, one pursues honor not for its own sake but as a sign of one's own goodness; it is, he says, virtue rather than honor that honor-lovers seek (*NE* 1095b25–30; cf. 1123b35, 1159a15–25). Insofar as it is manifested as the love of honor, spiritedness is thus open to an education about virtue, for in this case one wants to be *truly* worthy of respect.[22] Thus, the spirited concern with justice and honor and the erotic longing for happiness not only have potential political benefits, but they also can render one open in some measure to an education concerning the true goods of the soul. This, of course, does not by any means suggest that all spirited human beings are excellent students of virtue.[23] We must not forget the propensity of spiritedness to express itself as anger, which carries with it a sense of righteous certainty that hinders rather than helps education. If spiritedness can inspire attempts at self-improvement, it can also inspire self-satisfaction. In order to fulfill its potential as a vehicle of education, it has to be educated.

NOBLE SPIRITEDNESS

It is explicitly to the education of the guardians' spiritedness that Socrates turns in Book III. And it is the moral opinion at the heart of the human expression of

spiritedness that enables the city to educate spiritedness. It is the opinion that virtue demands its due recognition that enables the city to take spiritedness in hand and transform this feral and irrational quality into something that the city needs: courage—or, to be precise, political courage.

Courage is the first virtue that appears in the city in speech (375a; cf. 386a). Possessed above all by the city's soldiers, it is exercised on the battlefield for the sake of the city. This distinguishes it from the battlefield courage that Laches admires. Unlike Laches, whose admiration for the courageous hoplite focuses on his bravery in the moment of truth, Socrates and his interlocutors do not abstract from political considerations in their account of courage; after all, their primary aim is to found a city in speech. The courage that they seek to instill in the city's guardians through educating their spiritedness must serve the city. According to Socrates, the guardians are courageous because they are able "through everything" to preserve the opinion "produced by law through education about what—and what sort of thing—is terrible" (429c). Because the law teaches that citizens must do what is best for the city (412e, 413c), what is truly terrible is a failure to do this. But this opinion is not easy to sustain. It is frequently besieged by fear, pain, and desire, all of which have the power to dislodge even a very firmly rooted attachment to the city and to lead one instead to do what is or seems to be best for oneself (430b; cf. 412d4–7 with 412e1–2 and 413c7–10). The guardians' courage lies above all in their ability to fend off challenges to their willingness to do what is best for the city, for unless their bravery is firmly rooted in this opinion, it is not the political courage the city so needs. Guardians whose spiritedness has been properly trained into this political courage, then, will locate their honorable significance in remaining steadfastly devoted to the city. Whereas the ordinary spirited man may simply demand the respect of others whether or not he has "earned" it, the guardians will seek to demonstrate their worthiness through devotion to a cause greater than themselves.

Is it, however, truly virtuous to exercise courage only because doing so satisfies the *city's* need for courageous soldiers? In other words, is *political* courage a genuine virtue? Glaucon's speech at the beginning of Book II raises questions about whether justice, insofar as it involves sacrifice, is in fact a virtue. This necessarily implies similar questions about political courage, since its animating principle is serving justice—as the city understands it. Now Glaucon, as we have seen and as Socrates observes, is, despite what sophists teach about injustice and despite the power of his speech, not persuaded that injustice is superior to justice (368a–b; see also 347e6). We may say that this means he is also not persuaded that political courage is defective: he is more than open to the possibility

that courageous devotion to justice, or the common good of the city, is choiceworthy. But Glaucon also suspects that both justice and the heroic courage it requires might be foolish. He worries that he would be a fool to be just willingly (360d), because justice brings the just man misery rather than happiness. And according to Glaucon, if this is indeed the case, however much he is attracted to justice and heroic courage, he should do all he can to reject their allure.

In order to defend justice and the heroic courage that accompanies it adequately, Socrates must therefore show Glaucon that the heroically courageous just man is no fool. Glaucon demands that Socrates show that even if the just man has a reputation solely for injustice and ends up whipped, racked, bound, and with his eyes burned out, his decision to be just was worthwhile, because he is happier being just than unjust (358d, 361d–62a). Glaucon's attraction to the self-overcoming required of the just man is reminiscent of Laches' attraction to the notion of courage as the simple willingness to risk one's life, although Glaucon goes much further in illustrating the extreme conditions one must be able to embrace happily in order for virtue to be choiceworthy.[24] But his demand that the virtuous man be happy even under extreme conditions shows that he thinks (as Laches does when he proves unwilling to equate noble courage with foolishness) that the just man's heroic courage can be truly noble only if it is not foolish. But Glaucon goes much further than Laches in indicating what it means for the just man's heroic courage to be truly noble and choiceworthy; it must somehow make him happy. Thus the model of human virtue that Glaucon sketches in this famous speech is not merely courageous but rationally and happily courageous. In other words, truly noble courage must be rational in the sense that it cannot be something possessed by a fool, for only a fool, Glaucon implies, would choose that which makes him miserable. Thus, according to the criteria established in Glaucon's speech, if the guardians of the city in speech are to be truly admirable, the courage that the city cultivates in them must be rational; it must be *truly* good for the courageous individual's own soul. We will see whether Socrates' account of political courage actually measures up to this criterion.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Guardians' Education in Courage

SPIRITEDNESS AND THE PROBLEM OF THE GUARDIANS

Socrates' account of political courage emerges as he elaborates how courage should be inculcated in the city's future guardians. His elaboration of the guardians' education emerges by way of his critique and reform of the traditional Homeric teachings about the gods, Hades, and heroes. A fundamental part of this task is taming the guardians' spirited natures, since spiritedness is a potentially savage quality (375b9–10).[1] We have already seen some evidence that explains why he treats spiritedness in this way. Political courage, into which spiritedness is supposed to be transformed, means following the city's teaching about what is and is not truly terrible (429c–30c); that is, it means obeying the city's laws. But spirited men are often angry or proud, and angry or proud men often act impulsively and irrationally. This does not comport well with obedience. Achilles, the great warrior of Homer's *Iliad,* is a perfect example of how anger can lead to civil disobedience and political disaster. Indeed, the *Iliad* is in large part the story of the consequences of Achilles' refusal to help the Greeks fight the Trojans because he is angry at having been deprived of his war prize, the girl Briseis. His departure from the battle costs the Greeks dearly. Moreover, Achilles petulantly refuses to return to the battle even after Agamemnon offers not only to return Briseis but also to shower Achilles with many other gifts. Clearly, the lesson is that anger in the city's soldiers can spell disaster for the city. But Socrates goes even further than we might have expected. When he begins to de-

scribe the education reforms in Books III and IV, rather than harness spiritedness in order to make the guardians "willing to be courageous" in a noble fashion, as we suggested was possible in the previous chapter, Socrates appears to try to extirpate it entirely from their souls.

Although, as we will see, this does not turn out to be what happens, the uniqueness of the city under construction suggests why such drastic measures might be needed. The guardians of the city in speech must, after all, be obedient in a peculiar way, for they will not be guardians of any ordinary regime. Indeed, it is far from clear how significant their "guarding" function is; Socrates does not provide details of their military training.[2] What makes their role unique is that the city turns out to require philosopher-kings as its rulers (474c, 500e–501a). Socrates is cultivating guardians who are to obey philosopher-kings, but this is not likely to be easy for spirited men.

In the first place, spirited men are proud men who love honor and victory. To what extent can such men respect philosophers, who prefer quiet thinking instead of winning honor from others (496b–e, 549c–50a) and who think of ruling not as a great activity but as a duty they must fulfill (see 519c, 520b–21b)? Second, even if the guardians do come to respect philosophers, will they be content to adhere to a law that reserves rule to philosophers? Or will they not demand to share in rule themselves? If the tendency of spirited men is to make such a demand, it must be controlled in the guardians for the regime to succeed. After all, most guardians cannot hope to share in rule; those who do not become philosophers, or guardians in the precise sense (503b), must be satisfied with their roles. But can the spirited men Socrates says the city needs to defend it be satisfied with this? For spirited men to accept subordination to the rule of the wise would seem to require that they become wise themselves. While Socrates indicates that the reformed education they will receive will indeed be a *more* rational education than the traditional one provided (377e–78c, 379a, 386c), his ultimate distinction between the vast majority of guardians and those who can become rulers suggests that even the reformed education does not cultivate genuine wisdom. Socrates thus appears to be in the awkward position of having to devise an education that teaches courage by at the same time using *and* moderating spiritedness.

We will see, however, that there is a deeper reason for Socrates to try to moderate the guardians' spiritedness, which reason stems from the proposition that philosophers are not merely to rule the city in speech but to do so "in the light of day" (Strauss 1975, 38; Bruell 1994, 267). To the extent that philosophers rule openly, they will not have to disguise the understanding that governs their lives.

This implies that the guardians will have to accept not only the rule of philosophers but also the establishment of a philosophic theology in the city, which, because of its austere and distant gods, is very much at odds with traditional Greek piety. The problem here is that the austere theology Socrates describes is difficult for spirited beings to accept because the spirited love of justice that we discussed in the previous chapter tends, as we will see in this chapter, to look for external supports.

We get a glimpse of the substance of this theology at the beginning of Book II. Here Socrates proposes revising Homer's teachings about the gods in a way that turns out to make the city's theology more compatible with philosophy, which does not let pious scruples hinder its inquiries. The highest beings for the philosophers are presented in Book VI as the famous unchanging Ideas. Whatever else they do, they do not involve themselves in human affairs. The revised theology that Socrates proposes at the beginning of the construction of the city in speech prefigures the Ideas (see Bolotin 1995, 87). Socrates indicates that the guardians should hear stories only about gods who, first, are wholly good and who, second, cause only good things. Being the cause only of good things, however, appears to limit the degree of their involvement in human affairs. At the very least, these gods do not rule over human beings, for two reasons. First, ruling requires punishing injustice. It does not seem, however, that these gods punish anyone. If the gods cause only good things and if punishment involves harm, then although Socrates does not spell out this consequence, the gods do not punish (379b–c). But might not punishment be understood as correction rather than harm? If so, then Socrates' further claim that the gods associate only with the good and the wise (382e) means that they have no interest in correcting those individuals who need their chastisement.

Most important for our purpose, the fact that the city in speech is ruled—or, rather, not ruled—by distant gods means that the guardians need a courage that is self-reliant. They cannot think, for example, that their courageous devotion to the city will make them worthy of divine assistance or support. As we will learn, however, from Socrates' revision of the traditional education, spiritedness, the source of courage, is not self-reliant. Spiritedness and the concern for worthiness that we have suggested in the previous chapter drives it contain the hope that there are external forces that will help human beings secure the most important things. The challenge facing Socrates, then, is whether he can reconcile the city's need for the guardians to be spirited, on the one hand, with the need for them to be, on the other hand, obedient and self-reliant, both of which qualities are in some sense at odds with spiritedness and perhaps even at odds with each other.

ANGER'S WEAKNESS

Socrates and Adeimantus initially undertake, without Glaucon, the task of designing the guardians' education. They first agree that a sound education begins by telling the young the right stories and providing them with proper models to emulate (377b, 378c–d). Since a sound education means telling tales that are truer than what they now hear (377e–78c, 379a, 386c), this means encouraging the guardians to emulate models who embody more closely genuine virtues. Turning to the tales about Hades, Socrates and Adeimantus agree that the guardians will become courageous only if they hear tales about Hades that differ from the terrifying ones told by Homer (386a–b). According to Socrates, in order to be courageous, the guardians must hear the stories that "make them fear death least," for no one who "believes Hades' domain exists and is full of terror will be fearless in the face of death and choose death in battle above defeat and slavery" (386a–b). Homer's terrifying portrait of Hades makes it impossible, he suggests, to face death in battle bravely, because those who hear it are led to believe that death is the greatest evil; Adeimantus agrees with him that no one "who has this fear in him would ever become courageous." At least at first sight, this does not seem persuasive, especially since Socrates speaks of minimizing the fear of death as much as possible ("fear death least"): does not courage mean acting well in the face of fears rather than being able to act because one's fears are small?

Socrates spells out what he considers problematic about the Homeric tales in seven passages he cites that do indeed depict Hades as "full of terror." In two of them Achilles speaks from Hades, saying that it is incomparably bleak. Hades is so terrible, Achilles reports after arriving there, that he would prefer a long life on earth as "a serf to another" to the greatest honor in Hades (386c; cf. *Odyssey* XI.489); he also mourns the fate of his beloved friend Patroclus, whose ghost in the form of a mere shadow returns from Hades before Achilles dies. The other references to Hades reinforce its dreadfulness. Its occupants, for example, are like bats, fluttering around mindlessly and voicelessly in the dark; "even the gods hate it" (386d; cf. *Iliad* XX.64).

If, however, such images make the guardians fear death or, more precisely, fear it more than slavery, this by itself does not prove that they teach cowardice rather than courage. After all, in spite of this depiction of Hades, Homeric heroes and Greeks raised on tales about them were extraordinarily brave. As we have seen, when the Persians invaded Greece in huge numbers, the Greeks chose to stand their ground at places like Thermopylae and Plataea rather than submit to

enslavement. Can Socrates' desire, then, to reform the presentation of Hades be adequately explained by a belief that Homer's tales sap courage in soldiers? Socrates even acknowledges that the traditional tales about Hades did not simply instill fear in those who heard them. Socrates says that Homer's stories are actually "poetic and sweet for the many to hear" and that, while the terrible and fearful names applied to this domain, such as "Cocytus, Styx, 'those below,' 'the withered dead,' and other such names," give those who hear them "shivers," they may perhaps "be good for something else" (387b–c). Insofar as the tales themselves are not simply bad for those who hear them, Socrates may be concerned more about the *character* of the courage they teach than the possibility that they sap courage.

That this is true becomes clear when Socrates says that as a result of hearing these tales, the guardians will become "hotter and softer than they ought to be" (387c). The problem is thus not so much that the tales would make the guardians cowardly than that they would make them improperly courageous. Insofar as Socrates criticizes the tales for making the men "hotter" than they ought to be, he seems to mean that they make the guardians angrier: Homer's tales are defective because they nurture spiritedness. We can grasp what Socrates has in mind if we consider Achilles, whose sentiments are cited by Socrates to illustrate the harm caused by the offending tales and who seems to exemplify what it means to be hotter than one ought. According to Homer's tale, Achilles angrily withdraws from the war against the Trojans because of a slight to his honor; he even considers taking all of his ships home (*Iliad* IX.320). When he returns to battle, it is to wreak wild vengeance on Hector for having killed his dear friend Patroclus. His anger at Hector for killing Patroclus is so overpowering that, after seeking out and killing him, he vents his unexhausted rage by mutilating Hector's corpse. Indeed, his towering rage causes him to take on a god when he battles the river (391a–b; cf. *Iliad* XXII.20, XXI.225ff.). But if Achilles is a hothead, it is far from clear that frightening tales about Hades are responsible for this. At least at first sight, his rage seems caused less by the utter bleakness of Hades than by the failure of men and gods to grant him the respect he thinks he is due.[3] He refuses to fight because he is offended by Agamemnon's failure to return his war prize to him, and he considers taking his ships home because he thinks Zeus is not answering his prayer that the Greeks should suffer enormous losses as punishment for slighting Achilles (*Iliad* IX.315–22; cf. I.408–12 with VIII.343–46, 498–501).

Achilles' fierce concern for justice and honor may, however, be closely connected to the terrible tales he hears about Hades. Knowing that he is destined for a short life, the thought of having to endure the terrors of Hades so soon may

make him especially determined that his life be grand and glorious. As he says to his mother, "Since you bore me to be a man with a short life, therefore Zeus . . . should grant me honor at least" (*Iliad* I.350–55). His sense of honor and his wish to be treated as he believes he deserves may loom especially large to him precisely because of the terrible fate he ultimately faces. Indeed, Achilles' despair over what awaits him grows when the ghost of Patroclus visits him from Hades. Achilles is frightened by the fact that Patroclus seems to lack both a physical presence and a mind (386c–d; *Iliad* XXIII.100–106). It is thus in large part because of the fate that awaits him that he is so attached to honor. Because his fate is so terrible, he requires something extraordinary to make up for it, and his whole way of life seems to depend on the belief that this compensation will be forthcoming (*Iliad* I.165–71, IX.320–35, 410–20). Honor is for him the great compensation, and his desire to receive it prevails over all other concerns.

If the Homeric tales regarding Hades cause their auditors to become, like Achilles, feverishly concerned with justice and honor, Socrates has clear political reasons to reform them: doing so can minimize the guardians' excessive concern with honor and hence the feverish and unreliable courage that accompanies it. The greater their concern with honor, the more susceptible they are to anger and the more likely they are not to act as is best for the city—and not to act as is best for themselves either. If Homer's tales make the guardians ferocious fighters, their ferocity does not serve the city or themselves, for it comes at the expense of a more rational courage. When Achilles kills Hector, he is aware that, according to a prophecy, this means that he will soon die, too. But in his fury, he has no concern for himself; he seeks wildly to destroy Hector despite his mother's reminders about the result (*Iliad* XVIII.94–100). Once in Hades, however, Achilles himself calls into question the reasonableness of his actions when he expresses his preference to Odysseus for a long life on earth as "a serf to another" over the greatest honor in Hades (386c).

If, however, "hotness" is one problem with spiritedness, it is not the only problem that Socrates seeks to mitigate. Although Achilles' anger harmed the Greeks, his extremely irresponsible action was a rarity among Greek soldiers. More problematic for this city is the softness the tales inspire, for Socrates says that they make men "softer" as well as hotter "than they ought to be." The fourth of Socrates' seven references to Homer's offending tales suggests what he means. Here Socrates quotes Odysseus as saying that the seer Teiresias, whom Achilles encounters in Hades, "alone possesses understanding; the others are fluttering shadows" (386d). That Teiresias exists in Hades in this condition suggests that it is in fact possible through divine intervention to keep one's mind in

Hades and not wind up resembling a bat; it is by virtue of Persephone's grace that Teiresias was allowed to keep his mind and his gift of "seeing" in Hades.[4] The tales about Hades thus not only inspire a feverish concern with justice and honor. By pointing to the example of Teiresias, Socrates prompts us to wonder whether the tales in fact also inspire the hope that the gods can come to the aid of men and save them from a terrible fate (see also *Iliad* XVIII.120–21).[5]

Furthermore, if we consider the example of Achilles, it appears that anger goes hand in hand with just this sort of softness. Achilles' anger at being deprived of what he believes he deserves leads him to demand redress for his situation. This is to say that he demands that some force—specifically, Zeus—intervene to restore the world to its proper order. Achilles illustrates the connection between anger and belief in forces that can restore that order. If one believed it utterly impossible to obtain what one has been unjustly denied, one would very likely be resigned rather than angry. The angry man believes the world *should* be different, which is to say he thinks it *can* be different. Anger thus contains the hope that someone or something can and will rectify disorder in the world; it leads us to summon "gods" to our side. A small but telling indication of this may be found in our use of the expletive "Goddamnit!"[6] Of course, rarely does anyone who swears in this fashion consciously intend to invoke God, but that anger causes one to blurt out what is essentially a command for God's assistance suggests that anger inspires some sense of helplessness. The angry man may make great efforts on behalf of what he takes to be justice, but he is less self-reliant than may seem to be the case.

Numerous instances in the *Iliad* reveal that Achilles, despite his great power, is soft in the sense that he appears to depend greatly on Zeus; that is, he shows signs of precisely the kind of dependence that is at odds with the austere theology that Socrates proposes for the city in speech.[7] As we have seen, Achilles believes that Zeus must compensate him for his short life by ensuring that he receive abundant honor and glory (*Iliad* I.352). He depends on Zeus at least to right the wrongs that he suffers. When Agamemnon slights him, Achilles expects Zeus to restore his honor by making the Greeks suffer terribly and thereby realize how much they need him. But Achilles seems to want the gods to do more than help him get the honor that he is due.

Not long after withdrawing from the battle, Achilles notes that "a man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much" (*Iliad* IX.320), and this seems to cause him briefly to doubt the goodness of the honorable life. He even threatens to take his ships home in order to live a quiet but long life. Achilles' dawning realization that even the greatest honors bestowed on a hero do not fore-

stall death suggests how far beyond honor his concerns run. It also suggests that only recently has he had cause to consider that the good or honorable man still "dies." Part of Achilles' reflection is prompted by his realization of how much pain and suffering the honorable life contains (IX.321–34). And having realized this, he sees that he had been attracted to the honorable life not for itself but out of a hope that it might enable him somehow to escape a terrible fate in Hades. The honorable life, or the life of heroic courage, loses its luster for Achilles, as he begins to doubt that Hades is any different for worthy men and thus that honor or the honorable life *can* protect him from a terrible fate. The reason for these doubts is that, as we have seen, at this point it is unclear to him that Zeus will answer his prayers, for Zeus has not yet brought the battle to the Greek ships (cf. I.408–12 with VIII.343–47, 498–501). In this case, it is Achilles' belief that the gods have neglected him that leads him to a brief but revealing insight that he had hoped all along that the man who "does much" will be worthy of a fate better than that allotted to all other men, in particular some reprieve from Hades.[8] Indeed, Achilles' later readiness to resume the honorable life (XVI.62–64, 95–100) seems to coincide with his certainty that Zeus *has* answered his prayer and thereby upheld his honor. While Achilles explicitly acknowledges that Zeus has answered his prayers, his certainty that Zeus looks after good men is underscored by his belief that Zeus will honor him by answering his prayers again—this time to protect his beloved Patroclus (XVI.235–48).

The deepest problem with the courage inspired by the traditional tales of Hades is thus not that they make men unwilling to fight for the city but that they promote an excessively spirited courage, that is, a courage rooted in anger and therefore in a softness that encourages hopefulness.[9] By stoking this hopeful element in spiritedness, Homer's tales undermine self-reliance. Socrates' first proposals for reforming these tales rest on the premise that if the guardians hear no tales that depict Hades as terrible, they will be able to face death without the anger or hopefulness characteristic of the Homeric models.[10] We can see why Socrates may wish for a less bleak portrait of Hades. First, insofar as the guardians of the city in speech would not believe that they are facing a terrible fate after death, they would be less likely to demand compensation in this life, particularly in the form of honor and especially the greatest honor—rule. They would thus be more likely to accept their limited roles as obedient defenders of the regime. But, more significantly, guardians less prone to the anger that such a portrait arouses would also be less prone to its attendant softness and less dependent on providential gods to make their devotion to the city worthwhile; this would make the guardians more likely to accept Socrates' new teaching about the

gods. In fact, that Socrates is more concerned with minimizing softness than fierceness becomes clear after he finishes discussing Homer's tales about Hades and turns to his depictions of heroes lamenting. With a view to promoting in the guardians an extremely austere self-reliance, Socrates argues that the city in speech must excise all the tales of heroes and gods lamenting the deaths of loved ones.

In a way, eliminating all such examples is merely the natural consequence of the new teachings about Hades (387d). If Hades is not a terrible place, there is no reason to lament a loved one's departure for it. But Socrates brings up other reasons that gods and heroes should not be presented as wailing and lamenting. Socrates argues that a decent man should not lament the death of a friend because a decent man is most "self-sufficient" and "has least need of another" (387d–e). Here Socrates clearly does not mean merely to make the stories of gods and heroes consistent with the new treatment of Hades. The latter can be justified on simple political grounds: both excessive anger and softness are undesirable in a warrior. It is more difficult to justify excising Homer's depiction of heroes' wailing on such grounds. On the contrary, it seems to make little sense to have the warriors care so little about each other that they won't lament each other's deaths. For a mutual concern may well inspire soldiers to persist courageously in battle.

A political rationale thus seems insufficient to explain the prohibition against lamentation. Rather, the problem with indulging in wailing, as Achilles does when Patroclus dies, is that wailing expresses a needy softness, as Socrates makes clear later in the dialogue. In Book X, he suggests that wailing is a sign of pity and that the part in us that inclines to pity is, in fact, "a friend of cowardice" (604d; cf. 605d, 606b). The character of this cowardice becomes clearer if we consider what pity represents. According to Aristotle, pity is a feeling of pain at the sight of undeserved misfortune (*Rhetoric* 1385b12–18; *Poetics* 1453a6). Were the guardians to indulge in wailing, their wailing would signify the presence of the softness that is characterized by the view that the world can be *other* than it is. And as long as the guardians hold this opinion, they will not be self-reliant. For this opinion opens them up to the hope that gods, the only beings who could reliably ensure that human beings receive what they deserve, will come to the rescue of human beings. Allowing the guardians to indulge in pity would only make them cowardly because their hopes for external salvation would make them less capable of facing evils themselves. Wailing is thus not merely a sign of softness but rather fosters softness by reinforcing the hope that human beings *should* hold out hope that salvation from elsewhere will enable them to avoid a bad fate. And insofar as softness inclines one to persist in the hope that an evil can be avoided, it is inimical to

courage understood as honestly and steadfastly facing what is fearful.

Homer's portraits of gods and heroes are flawed because they legitimize such hopes. For example, as Socrates points out in his critique of lamentation, Homer depicts Zeus as crying over the imminent death of Sarpedon at the hands of Patroclus (388c–d). Socrates does not spell this out, but in Homer's passage, Zeus' distress over Sarpedon's plight leads him to consider plucking Sarpedon out of the battle and granting him immortality (cf. *Iliad,* XVI.433–44). Such a passage is inappropriate for the guardians to hear, since it encourages the belief that gods pity human beings and may even be persuaded to help or to save them. In order to suppress this sort of hope, Socrates wants his guardians to hear about models who do not lament because they are self-sufficient and therefore have least need of each other—even if this deprives the city of the sort of fierceness in battle that Achilles displayed in avenging the death of Patroclus.[11]

To grasp fully why Socrates promotes this extreme self-sufficiency—which, as we noted, does not seem militarily useful—we must recall that the city in speech is to be ruled by philosopher-kings and is thus to be as rational as possible. The self-reliant courage that Socrates promotes, which does not expect divine assistance, is an outlook rooted in reason alone; the more the citizens can hold this rational outlook, the more they will be true citizens of the regime. The revised models of courage will teach the guardians to be as free as possible from hopes for divine assistance and thereby enable them to live in a regime ruled by philosopher-kings rather than by providential gods.[12] To be sure, the guardians' education is not a rational education; at this stage they are taught tales, which, even if they are truer than traditional tales, are still only tales. But if the courageous disposition instilled in the guardians is the kind of disposition that a rational regime requires, it may also have something in common with the outlook or disposition of a fully rational or genuine courage. As we have seen, if their education were successful, the guardians would genuinely face up to fearful things—that is, face fearful things without expecting help from another quarter. If, moreover, they were to become self-sufficient individuals who did not view Hades as terrifying and who identified the city's good with their own (412d), then far from being an exercise in self-overcoming or self-sacrifice, their courage would be understood by them to be compatible with their own good. By reforming the traditional Greek education, Socrates strives to instill in the guardians a courage whose exercise will not make them miserable and thus not cause the internal friction and disharmony which Socrates will suggest in Book IV is inimical to a just soul (443d–e). In this way, Socrates responds to Glaucon's demand that virtue somehow make the virtuous individual happy and prepares the way for his striking ac-

count of the just soul as a unified, harmonious whole. Socrates aims to cultivate a courage that is exercised because the guardians believe it to be truly good for them. As we will later see, this courage has much in common with what Socrates will indicate is genuine courage.[13]

This is Socrates' goal. But does his reach exceed his grasp? In other words, can the guardians' education succeed in making them happy in the exercise of their courage? Can the revised portrait of gods and heroes convince the guardians that death is nothing terrible and that a decent man does not need others? There are serious reasons to doubt that Socrates thinks his education will train the guardians to risk their lives with such equanimity. Indeed, Socrates indicates that he himself thinks the guardians' self-sufficiency will be limited. If the guardians refrain from tears, they do so out of *shame*: when Socrates says that the city's poets should restrict depictions of wailing to the "least serious women and bad men," he adds that the guardians will not engage in wailing because "they won't be able to stand doing similar things to those such people do" (387e–88a). Then, in order to strengthen their resolve not to succumb to tears, Socrates says that each guardian should "ridicule" stories of men weeping and believe such behavior to be "unworthy of himself" (388d). It is thus shame that will make them strive to live up to the model of a "decent man" who does not need others; the guardians' education alone will not actually make them into such men. The guardians' fear of death and great pain at the loss of loved ones, as in any human being, cannot be eliminated simply by presenting them with appropriate models to emulate; these passions are embedded too deeply in their souls. But Socrates relies upon shame, for the presence of shame means that although the guardians will continue to have hopes and fears, when presented with the new models, they will at least strive not to appear as though they do.

Once we see the crucial role that shame will play in their lives, we can better understand why the guardians have to have spirited natures. The guardians' spiritedness helps them, as subphilosophic men, to emulate the tough, self-reliant role models that this highly rational city needs. It is spirited souls, as we have seen, that "admire and honor" (553d) and thus aspire to excellence. It is also spirited souls that feel shame when they fall short of the mark. When the guardians feel the sting of sorrows, they will care sufficiently about living up to the city's models that they will not succumb, at least publicly (cf. 605d–e), to what they (now) regard as shameful behavior.[14] While the guardians' spiritedness is in some ways an obstacle to the establishment of this highly rational city, it is also an asset. Spirited men are good for this particular city not because, as Socrates initially suggested, they are fierce defenders of their own, like dogs (375d–e), but

rather because they are attracted to an honorable life. In moderating the guardians' spiritedness, Socrates' education does not—cannot—moderate it so far as to deprive the city of the advantages of spiritedness. Rather, Socrates' education channels the guardians' spiritedness into a more politically reliable and suitable version than that of, say, Achilles.

The emphatically spirited guardians may be willing to be stalwart defenders of the city—as Glaucon's attachment to the city suggests (cf. 417b9 with 419a1–3)—but if so, this is due to their strong sense of shame rather than their genuine understanding that they have no need to lament or fear Hades. In other words, the guardians' education will not fully "take." But despite the power of their spirited sense of shame, the degree to which the education fails presents a problem for this city; if they are not as self-reliant as the models presented to them, then they will not likely be happy and possess harmonious souls. They will thus be much more inclined to hope secretly that gods do protect and assist human beings, even if their sense of honor induces them to strive to be as self-sufficient as possible and therefore to avoid turning to gods in any overt way (cf. 464e4–7). However this may be, their striving may still be an asset for the city because it has philosophic as well as political advantages. Insofar as one aims to be self-sufficient, one has no other recourse but one's own reason to consult in order to determine how to act in terrible circumstances. By presenting austere models to the guardians, Socrates makes them at least aspire to emulate rational models. He thus may lay the groundwork for a superior form of courage, one that enables its possessors to confront terrible things on their own. Refining spiritedness into an aspiration toward self-reliance may be a stepping stone for some on the path to both rationality and a superior courage, which we shall see go hand in hand.

MAGNIFICENCE

However useful a spirited sense of shame might be for making the guardians' willingness to defend the city courageously seem plausible, relying on it creates other problems for this rational city. At this stage of the city's development, the guardians' spirited service to the city will be hard and painful for them. Indeed, it appears that the guardians' lives will be characterized by sheer endurance. This becomes evident when Socrates turns from criticizing Homer's portrait of heroes lamenting to praising Homer's depiction of Odysseus' moderation, which he argues the guardians should emulate. Socrates praises Odysseus' control of his anger as a laudable example of moderation. The most notable example of this moderation is when Odysseus restrains himself from killing Penelope's atten-

dants for bedding the suitors who descended upon his home during his absence (390d; cf. *Odyssey* XX.17–18). Odysseus' ability to control his anger is a useful model for the guardians partly because Socrates wants them to be courageous without being angry. But Socrates does not merely praise Odysseus' self-control in general. Rather, he approvingly quotes Odysseus' exhortation to his spirit to "endure" because it "has endured worse before." Evidently, the guardians will have much to endure—which means that they are unlikely to have the self-sufficiency to live well that Socrates earlier indicated was characteristic of a "decent man" (387d–e).[15]

Indeed, as Socrates continues, it becomes clear that the guardians are being taught obedience above all. At least at this stage of the discussion, this seems more important than the overall health or excellence of their souls. When, for example, Socrates discusses the proper models of moderation, he describes not men with well-ordered passions but men whose great spiritedness allows them to *subdue* their strong passions. Indeed, to illustrate what he means by moderation, Socrates calls "immoderate" starving men who steal cattle for food (390b; cf. *Odyssey* XII.342). The guardians' "moderation" seems thus an ability to endure great suffering, even that caused by being deprived of basic needs, for the city's sake. In short, the guardians' lives as depicted here seem bleak. And the bleakness only intensifies, as their service to the city requires not only that they risk their lives for the city and submit to the permanent rule of philosopher kings but also, ultimately, that they give up private property and private families (416e). As Adeimantus objects at the beginning of Book IV, it is hard to see how serving the city benefits the guardians (see 419a–20a).

Indeed, the bleakness of their lives may explain why at this point Socrates says that the guardians should be presented with models who are not only courageous, moderate, and free but also "pious" (395c; see also 414a, 427b).[16] Why Socrates would call the guardians pious is puzzling. As we saw, Socrates' revised models both of gods and heroes seemed designed to instill in the guardians a self-reliance that would preclude a need for gods, particularly gods who are involved in human life and who demand much from human beings. But the persistence of the guardians' piety suggests an acknowledgment by Socrates that the education will not in fact reform their passions and thus that it will not truly reform their opinions about what is good. While they strive to emulate their new models out of a spirited love of honor, doing so is painful for them, because they do not really hold the opinions they are taught, at least not in their bones.

And honor does not appear to compensate sufficiently for their suffering. Indeed, there is no indication at this point that the guardians, in their courageous

service to the city, will exercise a virtue that is or promises to bring them some kind of fulfillment or happiness. Because of the difficulty of enduring a life in which they have no hope of happiness, it is not surprising that they are in fact very serious about fulfilling what they think the *gods* demand from them; their virtuous citizenship may well depend on the hope that the gods will bring them the happiness that is missing from their lives. The piety that Socrates expects the guardians to have, therefore, appears to reflect the insufficient choiceworthiness of their lives.

Toward the end of Socrates' discussion of the guardians' musical education (400d1–403c7), however, Socrates seems to focus more on those among the guardians who will be the philosopher-kings, and the prospects of these guardians seem brighter. For Socrates begins to speak of the *end* of the guardians' education, which he implies is about cultivating a good and noble soul (400d10–e3). Socrates then enumerates a different list of virtues, which he says "we" or the guardians "we say we must educate" must have in order to have good and harmonious souls (402b–c). Significantly, in this list, magnificence (*megaloprepeias*) replaces piety (402c3). This replacement seems more compatible with at least some of Socrates' objectives in the city. While neither the bleakness of the guardians' lives nor their piety would necessarily undermine their willingness to risk their lives for the city, their piety is at odds with the austere theological teachings of the city. Moreover, Socrates has other plans for at least some among this guardian class: philosopher-kings are to be drawn from their ranks. Accordingly, there emerges a different picture of the guardians and the proper early education for at least the best among them. The proper early education involves cultivating magnificence instead of piety by way of an education in the proper love of beauty.

But what exactly is magnificence, and how is its substitution for piety related to an education in courage? The Greek word means that which is fitting or seemly for a great man. Socrates uses it in Book VI to describe the rare nature that is capable of becoming philosophic, saying that such a nature possesses "an understanding endowed with magnificence and the contemplation of all time and all being" (486a8–9). We might think, then, that magnificence means an awareness of one's own greatness and a disposition toward grand achievements. This may be correct, but it is not adequate. Socrates adds, with Glaucon's eager agreement, that to one who possesses "an understanding endowed with magnificence," human life does not seem to be anything great nor death anything terrible (486a–b). Here, rather than leading to an assertion of one's greatness, magnificence leads to a kind of contempt for human life. What does this mean, though, about the magnificence that Socrates aims to inculcate in at least some

of the guardians? Are they to have contempt for human life? The education in beauty that precedes Socrates' replacement of piety with magnificence as one of the guardians' virtues helps explain the new direction in Socrates' education.

After finishing their discussion of Homer's tales, Socrates and Adeimantus turn to the kinds of songs, melodies, rhythms, and art that the guardians should experience. Socrates strives here to awaken in the guardians an appreciation of beauty and to inject into the city beautiful things that can inspire a happier dedication to it. If the guardians are alive to the possibility of genuine beauty in the city, then perhaps they will believe that, because the city makes such beauty possible, the city itself is something beautiful. Insofar as they see the city in this light, they will understand their service to the city, especially their exercise of courage, as something fulfilling rather than as a painful sacrifice. The education in beauty aims at more than obedience; it cultivates graceful, harmonious souls (400e). In doing so, it enables the guardians to find sources of happiness in each other, as their harmonious and thus beautiful souls inspire love (402d–3c). In one sense, this education could serve to attach the guardians more to the city insofar as they see the city as the reason for the existence of the beauty they admire and experience in the city. This may lead them to think that only by service to their city will they find true fulfillment.

Exposing them to beautiful arts, however, is intended to do more than harmonize, after a fashion, the guardians' needs with those of the city. Socrates argues that this education in the arts in fact constitutes a proto-rational education and accordingly emphasizes exposing the guardians to arts that are graceful, orderly, and harmonious (400d–e). The guardians should not, for example, hear harmonies or rhythms that imitate wailing and lamenting (398d–e) nor instruments like the flute, which produces especially passionate or tragic sounds (399d; cf. 411a–b). All of the arts will aim to capture "the nature of what is beautiful and graceful" (401b–d; cf. the importance of gracefulness at 486d–e). Socrates claims that the young, by being exposed to this kind of beauty, will learn to "blame and hate" (402a) what is disharmonious, confused, and defective, and to love the opposite. Because the young will "blame and hate" what is ugly in the right way before they are able to grasp reasonable speech, when reasonable speech comes to them, they will "take most delight in it, recognizing it on account of its being akin" (402a). To the extent that this is true, those who receive the proposed education in beautiful arts will have at least the subrational foundation for the orderly and harmonious soul that Socrates will later indicate is essential both to human happiness and genuine virtue (443d–e).

If the education in beauty lays the groundwork for happier lives, still the ques-

tion remains: how does the exposure to a (proto-rational) beauty cultivate magnificence? The education in beauty seems designed to inspire, in at least some of the guardians, an appreciation of and longing for beauty on a grand scale that is characteristic of magnificence (cf. Aristotle's discussion of magnificence at *NE* 1122b15–19). Being surrounded by orderly and harmonious music, rhythms, and artifacts habituates the guardians to believe that a pleasing order permeates the universe. They may also feel a sense of pride that because they genuinely appreciate the beauty around them, they to some degree participate in a universal order and harmony.[17] But the order and harmony they are taught most to admire is not natural. Significantly, Socrates focuses on exposing the guardians to artificial rather than natural beauty—for example, to beautiful and graceful "images of animals . . . houses or anything else their craft produces" made by excellent craftsmen (401b–c). Exposure to such craftsmanship may be intended to give the guardians an early experience of the fact that the world yields—and yields beautiful things—to human endeavors. They are not only taught to appreciate beauty but also inspired to be the cause of beauty. When combined with their belief in their own virtue, this inspiration can generate in them a powerful longing to achieve something grand on their own. This powerful longing to participate in something grand seems to be the magnificence that Socrates repeatedly associates with the philosophic nature (486a, 487a, 490c, 494b. 503c, 536a).

Guardians endowed with such magnificence would be more compatible with Socrates' austere theology than those whose attachment to the city depends on shame. Proud, magnificent men are wont to think of themselves as self-reliant and so would prefer to strive to imitate the gods rather than to seek their assistance or care. They may well think of their own magnificent aspirations as in some way participating in a divine activity. Insofar as they see themselves as imitating the divine, we can see why they would think that "human life is nothing great." In aspiring to enduring, significant creations, they would see ordinary human life as an impermanent, and therefore insignificant, blip on the screen. This disposition has implications for the character of their courage. If ordinary human life is nothing great, then, as Glaucon and Socrates later agree, death is nothing terrible. Death is not terrible if one is able to fulfill one's aspirations and accomplish something of splendid beauty or grand significance. Individuals filled with a longing to test their own capacities will experience courage not as self-denial on behalf of the city or shame-filled endurance but as noble self-fulfillment.[18]

Now when Socrates describes the magnificence of the potential philosopher, he emphasizes its contemplative character. Yet, particularly in its initial appearance as the culmination of the education in beauty, magnificence is more inti-

mately connected to creating or contributing to beauty, and this connection to the creation of beauty is crucial. As we have seen, the creation of beautiful things confers upon the creator a kind of divinity insofar as he imitates or participates in something approaching the divine. To the extent, then, that magnificence aspires to a divine-like significance, it may also aspire to the freedom from evils that accompanies divinity. Perhaps this is the deepest reason why one with an "understanding endowed with magnificence" does not think death is something terrible (486a): the contemplation of all time and all being may enable one, somehow, to escape death.

The education in magnificence is, then, akin to a new religion, a religion of beauty. As such it provides the basis for a happier and less painful attachment to the city as the home of beautiful individuals and opportunities to fulfill magnificent aspirations as well as a path for a few of the guardians toward philosophy. Magnificence, however, remains a form of spiritedness, albeit a noble and refined form of it. The education in beauty transforms rather than transcends spiritedness; it sets one's aspirations higher, but those aspirations are still spirited ones. The guardians' magnificence remains part of their understanding of themselves as virtuous and honorable human beings, as truly deserving of the seriousness with which they believe human beings—especially such outstanding ones—ought to be treated. For this reason, the guardians' magnificent character and courage remains within the horizon of civic virtue, for it remains bound up with the belief that virtue consists in devoting themselves to something greater than themselves, to a city, for instance, that is beautiful in itself and that is home to beautiful individuals. While those who receive the education in beauty may not suffer like the earlier shame-filled guardians, it seems that the magnificent guardians will be drawn to the self-sacrifice that is still required of them—at least if Glaucon's reaction to the unfolding education is any indication.[19]

For Glaucon proves quite willing to sacrifice for the city. As we intimated, the cultivation of "good and fair dispositions" in the guardians leads them to fall in love with each other. Indeed, since their characters are "most lovable," their love will be "immoderate" and "mad" so as to threaten to overwhelm their concern for virtue. It is therefore necessary to restrict the guardians only to kissing their beloveds (402d–3c). Glaucon acquiesces in this restriction, despite his personal knowledge of the power and pleasure of immoderate love (see 402e). In fact, Socrates gives him the credit for it: "You'll set down this law." Apparently enamored of Socrates' portrait of the guardians, Glaucon reveals a kind of magnificence in his desire to set down a law *himself* that subordinates his "immoderate" desires to virtue. In restricting the fulfillment of what he thinks are his "low" de-

sires, Glaucon wants to submit to himself and his own law. But Glaucon's law calls out for opportunities to demonstrate one's virtue by overcoming oneself or devoting oneself to something splendid. Precisely this desire to find one's happiness, or proof of one's virtue, in overcoming oneself forces us to question whether magnificence is wholly self-reliant or whether Glaucon is truly magnificent—or whether the guardians could become so, from this education alone. Indeed, when Glaucon agrees that the guardians should not consummate their desires, he swears by Zeus, as though he needs divine support to accept this limitation (403b3).[20]

THE LIMITATIONS OF POLITICAL COURAGE

Even if magnificent guardians could be wholly self-reliant, cultivating magnificence in the guardians does not solve all of Socrates' political difficulties. A courage rooted in magnificence is more self-sufficient than shame-based courage because the guardians see it as a genuinely fulfilling virtue; it is not necessarily the most public-spirited courage. Glaucon "sets down" the law restricting love affairs less because it is good for the city than because he agrees with Socrates that the passionate love he feels for beautiful souls is incompatible with virtue. This suggests that magnificent guardians will be concerned above all with their own characters and that they will see themselves as the peak of the city. This belief may lead them to accomplish much for the city, but they would understand their achievements as expressions of their excellence rather than as what they are obliged to do for the city. This is to say that the guardians, now that they have been educated in magnificence, are not quite as likely to be as obedient as the city needs them to be. For the city makes extremely rigorous demands on its guardians, requiring them on each occasion to "do what they believe to be advantageous to the city" (412e, 413c). Thus, in order to find the best rulers for the city, Socrates must ensure that the guardians will be not only courageous defenders of the city but obedient servants of it.

To find a ruling class that will be sufficiently devoted to the city, the guardians must be tested during and after their education to see whether or not they meet the criterion of being always willing to put the city first. Socrates says that the best among the guardians must be subjected to tests in order to demonstrate their ability to hold onto the opinion through "terrors and pleasures" that they must always do what is best for the city (412d–e).[21] Those who pass these tests are ultimately said to have, among other virtues, the courage that the education has aimed to cultivate (429c–30b; cf. Gadamer 1986, 64–65). Indeed, Socrates de-

scribes their city as courageous precisely because one part of it, the guardian class, has the power "that through everything will preserve the opinion produced by law through education about what—and what sort of thing—is terrible" (430c). But even as he describes the guardians' courage, Socrates raises questions about it. It seems that these obedient servants of the city will not exercise a genuine courage. When Socrates describes their courage, he calls it "political," and he alerts Glaucon to the possibility of a "finer" kind of courage (430c3–5).

The problem with political courage is captured in Socrates' definition of it. Courage in the city depends upon the guardians' preserving the opinions that the laws instill in citizens. While it may not be the first thing about courage that comes to mind, to say that courage means maintaining opinions, as opposed to performing actions, makes great sense. As we have already seen with Laches, it is hard to separate courage from the belief that the courageous action leads to some perceived good. But not only do courageous actions depend on some understanding of their end or purpose, they also *arise* from certain opinions about what is good or terrible for the courageous man himself; the soldier who believes in death before dishonor will not act bravely in a crisis unless he maintains that opinion throughout it. There are good grounds, therefore, to define courage in terms of opinions about what things are truly terrible.

Now here Socrates defines courage in terms not just of any opinion but of opinions cultivated by the city. For this reason, at least, Socrates speaks of "political courage" (430c); he may also call this courage political because it *serves* the city. The connection between this courage and the city's opinions explains why he deems it inferior to the courage that a "finer treatment" of the virtue would describe.[22] First, one might say that political courage *per se* is defective because its quality varies with the location; the goodness of political courage in a given city depends on the quality of that city's opinions. At least as was evident in the *Laches,* one may hesitate to call an action brave to the extent that one believes its purpose is harmful or wicked. To take an extreme example, if one attributes courage to German soldiers in World War II who believed it was more terrible that the Nazi regime be defeated than that they die in its defense, one would be inclined to argue that their courage was inferior—inferior to that displayed by, for example, Germans who resisted the regime. That the loyal Nazi soldier lacks the virtue to recognize the wickedness of his regime and thus the cause for which his courage was exercised may leave someone who would ordinarily admire such courage with the nagging sense that the Nazi soldier was fundamentally lacking in virtue. And the notion that someone lacks virtue in this important respect tends to impugn his other virtues, including his courage. Insofar as we think courage is a virtue, we, like Laches, have or can be led to have a difficult

time associating it with any person or any action that we find essentially abhorrent.

But if political courage depends on the city it serves, why would one call inferior the courage displayed by the guardians of the city in speech, that is, the most just and best city? How can a courage that preserves the opinions promulgated by such a city be defective? Perhaps it is simply because the guardians' courage, however impressive it is, still rests on opinion; they have not themselves fully learned why what the city says is terrible truly is so (cf. 442c1–3). But is the guardians' courage inferior only because they have not yet transformed their opinions into knowledge? This does not get to the heart of the matter. According to Socrates, even this city is not fully led by or living in light of the truth. Socrates says, for example, that the philosophers will dread the time they spend ruling in even this city; for they will know that what they see and promote in the city are mere phantoms of the just, noble, and good things (520b–d; see also 516d–e, 517d–e, 519c–d, 540b–c; Irwin 1977, 221).

Socrates is forthright about the fact that at least some things the city teaches can be called lies. Above all, he says that, in order for their patriotism to be assured, the guardians and the rest of the citizenry will have to be told and must believe the famous "noble lie." Citizens are to believe that they originally sprang fully formed from the earth and that their placement in one of the city's three classes has been determined at birth by the kind of metal they have in their souls (414b–15c). By encouraging citizens to see the earth as a common mother and hence to see each other as siblings, the noble lie sustains the belief that the city is one big family and hence continues the effort to harmonize the citizens' and the city's good. Socrates' reason for teaching the guardians this "noble lie" can be discerned in what he says just prior to proposing it. As we observed earlier (see note 11), Socrates claims that the best guardian will be the one who loves the city because he believes "that the same things are advantageous to it and to himself" (412c–d). Insofar as this is the case, the guardians' loyalty to the city, their willingness to risk their lives for it, thus depends on their belief that they fulfill their own good in looking to the city's good. Can this belief be true? The very need for the noble lie casts grave doubt on this possibility. That the guardians must think of the city as a family born of the same mother underscores the extent to which the education the guardians have thus far received is not sufficient to make them believe that their own advantage is identical to that of the city; the noble lie is needed to shore up each guardian's supposition that "if [the city] did well, he too himself would do well along with it."

Now, that a lie is needed to shore up this proposition does not in and of itself prove that the supposition is false,—that is, it does not prove that the guardians'

advantage is *not* the same as the city's advantage. One might say that the guardians' advantage is the same as that of the city but that seeing this is not easy; perhaps the noble lie simply helps to maintain belief in a correct opinion.[23] If so, this lie is not enough to do the trick. Socrates concedes here in Book IV that the city will look up to providential gods rather than the distant gods described in Book II. He describes gods who both punish citizens for disloyalty to the city and reward them for loyalty to it. If, for example, the citizens violate the natural hierarchy in the city, the city will be destroyed (415c). And the guardians are promised further and posthumous rewards for their service to the city (414a; see also 427b–c, 519e). Still, these may be merely additional myths meant to sustain correct opinions. The true role of these sanctions ultimately depends on whether the guardians' advantage can be so clearly linked to the city's that they find true fulfillment and happiness by dying for it.[24]

Socrates at least seems highly doubtful that it can. We should recall that just prior to proposing the noble lie, Socrates indicated that the guardians would need to undergo trials to determine their loyalty. Although he had initially suggested that the guardians will believe that their advantage is identical to that of the city (412d), he immediately proceeds to insist that proof of the guardians' loyalty is that they will always do "what is advantageous for the city" (412e, 413c). By leaving out of this last statement that the guardians are also doing what is most advantageous for themselves, Socrates quietly suggests that in acting for the city the guardians may not in fact be doing what is most advantageous for themselves. Moreover, as we have seen, Socrates recommends that all guardians, even those who pass the patriotism tests, be denied private possessions. Apparently, the guardians' education in moderation is not a sufficient shield against "licentiousness, hunger or some other bad habit" (416a). The problem that seems to warrant this measure is the following: if there were anything that the guardians wanted from the rest of the city, their toughness and courage would enable them to take it. Indeed, it seems that these precautions—education, patriotism tests, and communism—do not suffice to protect the rest of the city from the guardians; the guardians can have no privacy either (416d–e). Presumably this last restriction is intended to ensure that if all other precautions fail, at least the guardians will have no opportunity for intrigue. The number and extent of these machinations raise serious doubts about just how much the guardians' advantage and the city's coincide.[25]

These doubts are bolstered vividly in Book V when Socrates articulates the dubious premise on which rests the notion that the guardians' advantage and the city's advantage are the same. There he claims that this identity of interests rests

on the city's being a "community of pain and pleasure" (463e–64b). Every citizen is supposed to be affected by the pains and pleasures of his fellow citizens in the same way that each part of one's body is affected by the pains and pleasures of other parts. Only if this were true, it appears, could there be such a strong common interest between the guardians and the city that the guardians could be understood to be exercising their courage just as much with a view to their own advantage as to the city's advantage. No such thoroughly common interest exists, however. While we may speak of a whole city's suffering if, for example, a storm destroys houses, such speech is loose; those whose houses are entirely destroyed suffer in ways that those whose houses survive do not, and the builders who are hired to rebuild the houses may even be said to benefit.

In the case of this city, we can already see how some will benefit from the suffering of others. Socrates and Glaucon agree that denying the guardians private possessions and privacy itself will benefit the rest of the city by ensuring that the guardians will not inflict harm on the other citizens (416a–e). These strictures obviously benefit the rest of the city. But Socrates' insistence that the guardians must demonstrate under duress their willingness to put the city first and that they must always be carefully watched suggest that the guardians suffer as a result (see also 419a, 421b–c). At the very least, the rest of the city does not experience the pains of the guardians' penury. Even in this city, then, it is simply false to say that each individual's advantage is identical to those of his fellow citizens or to that of the city.

The inferiority of political courage thus does not seem to turn merely on the difference between correct opinion and knowledge. Political courage means preserving under all circumstances what the law teaches about the terrible and not-terrible things, and this means, even in this city, preserving at least some false opinions. When Socrates later moves beyond his political focus and compares the virtues in the city to those in the individual (recall that the purpose of founding the city in speech was to illuminate the latter's virtues), he says that the courageous individual preserves "through pains and pleasures" not the city's opinions about what is truly terrible but rather "what has been proclaimed by *reasoned speeches* about that which is terrible and that which is not" (442c; emphasis added). Genuine courage, as opposed to inferior "political" courage, is guided by reason.[26]

This, of course, was readily discernible in Socrates' linking political courage to opinion. The question now is, What does reason dictate? If the individual's good is not identical to that of the city, then which good does reason dictate we should pursue?[27] Socrates' analogy between the city and the individual soul sug-

gests that the guardians possess only political courage not just because, as we have said, they have not reasoned out for themselves what is and is not truly terrible but also because in following the city's dictates, they do not look to the advantage of their own souls, as the parallel between city and individual suggests they should. For the parallel implies that what the political version of a virtue does for the city, the "personal" counterpart should do for the individual. If the guardians' political courage leads them to do what is "advantageous for the city" as a whole (412e), then according to Socrates' analogy, the individual's courage should look to what is advantageous for the individual as a whole (cf. 441e, 443d).

To see, however, that political courage is deficient and why it is so does not yet raise a most perplexing aspect of Socrates' discussion of it, perhaps the most perplexing aspect. If the parallel that Socrates has drawn between the city and the soul implies that, as political courage looks to the city's good, so genuine courage looks to the individual's good, is this anything more than an assertion on Socrates' part, especially since it is based upon an admittedly imprecise parallel (435d)?[28] Does Socrates present here evidence that courage is genuine only when it is exercised in the knowledgeable pursuit of the good of one's own soul rather than as the noble devotion that appears to be the highest expression of spiritedness? In the next chapter we will try to discern the reasons underlying Socrates' implicit indications about genuine courage by examining his treatment of the proper education for philosophy. For Socrates indicates numerous times when he discusses the educational reforms of Books II and III that there is another, finer education, which is geared not just to guarding the city but also to living well and which involves a finer treatment of the virtues, including courage (407b–c, 411c–d, 416b–c; see also 430c, 435d, 504b–e). Only those who philosophize, Socrates maintains, lead a truly "good and prudent life" (521a). Only philosophers, he thereby implies, possess genuine virtue and hence genuine courage.

CHAPTER SIX

Courage and Philosophy

AN EDUCATION FOR COURAGE

A careful examination of Socrates' attempt to cultivate courage in the guardians invites us to investigate the argument underlying Socrates' indication that the "finer" kind of courage is exercised above all with a view to the good of an individual's own soul. Why, in other words, is the noble courage displayed by the guardians in their devotion to the city not as good as courage gets? As we have seen, a crucial problem with the guardians' courage stems from a disjunction between the character of the courage at which their education aims and the character of the courage that they are likely to embrace. Socrates has said that the reason the guardians should be dedicated to the city and willing to risk everything for it is that, in exercising their courage, they secure their own as well as the city's advantage (412d). But we have seen evidence, above all in the noble lie, that Socrates doubts that the guardians will in fact be happy and fulfilled in their dedication to the city. There is additional evidence that despite Socrates' contrivances, this is not how the guardians themselves will understand their service to the city, which further clarifies for us why their courage may be legitimately called inferior.

One sign of the way the guardians will understand their service to the city lies in Socrates' comparison of their lives to those of Olympic victors. Insofar as the guardians were akin to Olympic victors, they could understand themselves to be fulfilling themselves when acting on behalf of the city. But Socrates cites the Olympic victors to emphasize the guardians' superiority to them, not their similarity.

Because the guardians win victory for the whole city rather than for themselves, Socrates implies that they will think of their victory as "nobler" than that of the Olympians and that the public support will be "more complete." As a result, the guardians are "crowned with support and everything else necessary to life—both they themselves and their children as well; and they get prizes from their city while they live, and when they die they receive a worthy burial" (465d–e). What appears to make the guardians' victory nobler is the great sacrifice they make for the city, which is why the public support for them is "more complete" and the honors accorded them so extensive. The public support and honors the guardians receive serve as gratitude and even as compensation for their sacrifices.[1]

Glaucon, too, seems to understand the guardians' courageous devotion as noble in the sense indicated above, namely, in the sense of being willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the city.[2] Indeed, Glaucon seems attracted to the city precisely because it calls for such heroic devotion.[3] Although Glaucon seems to be interested in the construction of the city only once he believes that it provides a path to individual fulfillment (398c–d; cf. Bloom 1991, 360), if of an austere kind, he interprets this fulfillment, paradoxically, as available to those who ultimately subordinate themselves completely to the city. To be sure, by agreeing to the noble lie, Glaucon seems to accept Socrates' attempt to make the guardians believe that their own interests and the city's coincide. But he also agrees to Socrates' patriotism tests to determine who among them will "always do what is best for the city" (413d–14a), and he agrees to deny them private property and private families (416d–17b). Most significantly, despite all the deprivations that the guardians must suffer, Glaucon does not express wonder, as Polemarchus and Adeimantus do, about whether the guardians themselves will be happy (see 419a–20a and 449b–d). That he remains attracted to the city even after hearing the full scope of the demands that it makes on the guardians suggests that he is attracted to it precisely because of the self-transcendence it requires, precisely because it asks the guardians *not* to serve their own advantage. Indeed, his enthusiasm for the city is consistent with what his speech about justice in Book II revealed is his attraction to the demands of virtue, especially of a kind of heroic self-overcoming.[4]

Glaucon's enchantment with the prospect of complete devotion to the city is compatible with his demand that justice be such a great good that it is worth suffering any evil for its sake (361d–62a). This means that the courage needed to support such justice would be a courage that enables one to sacrifice all other goods for the sake of justice. But if this is the case, must not Glaucon be inclined to resist the full implications of the model of individual courage provided by

Socrates' account of political courage? To follow Socrates' analogy of the city and the soul, if the city manifests political courage when its spirited part, the guardians, looks to the good of the city, then the individual must manifest courage when his spirited part looks to his own good. That account reinforces what our analysis has revealed about courage: if courage is most a virtue when it benefits its possessor, then genuine courage cannot be understood in terms of sacrifice. What Glaucon demanded of justice in Book II seems to apply to virtue *per se* and therefore to courage: he wants it be so good that it is worth the sacrifice of everything else. He wants it to be choiceworthy even if it means making the sacrifices that he so vividly describes in Book II.

Glaucon, however, is not a glutton for punishment. When he asks Socrates in Book II to vindicate the choice of the just man whose justice causes him to die both in pain and as a man of ill repute, he asks him to show that justice is good for this man, that it is a good that outweighs all others. If in his attraction to the just man's willingness to sacrifice himself, Glaucon seems similar to Laches, he also differs from Laches in an important way; he is not only spirited and courageous, he is also erotic (see especially 360a–b, 474c–d, 548d–e). He makes a much more open and forceful demand than Laches did, or would, that this sacrifice be worthwhile for the just, or courageous, man himself. Glaucon's erotic nature brings into sharper focus the problem, which we have seen dimly present in Laches, with understanding the nobility of courage in terms of risk or sacrifice. Glaucon's attraction to noble courage brings out an important element of the problem with the guardians' courage, or with "political" courage; it is not merely that it is based on opinion and on lies that the city tells its citizens: it is also that political courage is based on lies—or at least a confusion—that they are inclined to tell themselves. If Glaucon's own inclinations are any indication, those guardians who are not themselves philosophers will occupy a halfway house, believing both that they nobly devote themselves to the city in disregard of their own good *and* that they thereby achieve their own good. If virtue means truly knowing what one is doing, genuine courage is not possible until this confusion is sorted out.[5]

COURAGE AND THE PROBLEM OF THE GOOD

In describing the guardians' courage, Socrates says, as we noted, that it is possible to give "a finer treatment" of courage (430c). This treatment seems to arrive especially in the form of Socrates' discussion in Book VI of philosophic natures and of the studies needed to cultivate them (504a–b), for this is where Socrates

begins to sketch the elements of a *rational* education. In Book V Socrates drops his famous bombshell that the city in speech could come about only if philosophers were kings or kings could adequately philosophize (473d, 499b); he then proceeds to describe philosophers and to argue that they alone should rule. They have two main qualifications for ruling: they possess the wisdom to legislate well—and all the other parts of virtue (484d). Now Socrates suggests that their virtues stem in part simply from their natures; their passionate love of learning channels all their energies away from vice and toward acquiring wisdom. But at least in the city in speech, their natures are perfected by education (487a), in particular by an education in what Socrates ultimately calls the "greatest studies" (503e). These include calculation, geometry, and astronomy, but the "greatest" study of all concerns the famous "idea of the good" (505a; cf. 523b).

This study seems to be the culmination of a philosopher's education because it teaches him to understand virtue properly. Socrates says that studying the idea of the good is the path to the "most perfect elaboration" of the virtues, which is much superior to the limited understanding that he and his interlocutors attained by founding a city in speech and investigating the virtues based on an analogy between the city and the individual soul (504a–e). The gain in understanding is no merely intellectual achievement; Socrates speaks of education as perfecting natures, as enabling one to acquire the whole of virtue. But how does acquiring a more precise understanding of the virtues lead to the actual acquisition of virtue and—in particular for our purposes—of genuine courage? In order to see this and to understand this courage better, we must try to understand what the study of the good involves and why Socrates indicates that it is the most important study for acquiring not "political" virtue but virtue itself.

Socrates' description of the "idea of the good" and the study of it is rather opaque. He claims both that he does not know "the good itself" but has only an opinion about it, and that he can explain that opinion to Glaucon only by analogizing it to the sun. It is beyond our purpose here to delve into the complexities of Socrates' analogy. Rather, we will restrict ourselves to considering first, why Socrates offers a dual account of the study of the "idea of the good," the two components of which seem to be at odds with each other, and second, how these two parts can be reconciled.

Socrates' initial discussion of the study suggests that it is something extremely lofty.[6] He presents the idea of the good as a quasi-divine first cause of all things. Comparing the idea of the good to the sun, Socrates says that it causes things to be known just as the sun causes things to be seen. He cryptically adds that the idea of the good, which he says causes not just the truth of the beings but

even their existence, is more beautiful than knowledge or truth and of greater dignity and power than being itself (507d–9b). By highlighting the nobility and beauty of the good, Socrates allows his auditors to conclude that it is worthy not just of study but even of self-forgetting devotion. Indeed, he identifies a difference between the good and the sun that makes the former seem much loftier than the latter: whereas the sun illuminates the same objects that sight grasps only dimly without it, that is, things that come into being and pass away, the idea of the good illuminates "objects of intellection" that exist permanently (508d–e). Thus, whereas those human beings who do not know the idea of the good live on the level of opinion, those who know it grasp the truth about beings of surpassing grandeur and nobility. Indeed, when Socrates says that the study of the good enables one to grasp "by intellection itself that which is good in itself" (532b), he suggests that those who are immersed in the "greatest study" transcend themselves in the contemplation of the highest being.

At the same time, Socrates indicates that studying the idea of the good is much less transcendent than his analogy to the sun suggests. When he first mentions the "greatest study," he says that it is something of which Adeimantus has heard "many times," by which he means a study that makes the "just things and the rest" become "useful and beneficial." Socrates and Adeimantus then agree that no knowledge of the just and of other things can be of any "use to us" without knowledge of the good, because there is no "profit" in possessing anything "in the absence of the good" (505a–b). Whatever else the good is, these statements suggest that it is good for us in the simple sense that it benefits whoever studies it and thereby serves him rather than the other way around. One needs to know it, Socrates says, in order for the virtues, including courage ("the just things and the rest"), to be useful for us and therefore worth possessing. Socrates goes on to say that the good is what "every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything" (505d–e). Insofar as the good makes everything worth having and is what everyone seeks, it seems to be the *sine qua non* of true human happiness.[7]

This explanation of the good, however, is not very revealing, since it fails to identify what the good is; it does not tell us in what happiness consists. Indeed, this is the very problem; Socrates claims that "the soul divines that [the good] is something but is at a loss about it and unable to get a sufficient grasp of what it is" (505e). He identifies two things that people claim constitute happiness, but he leaves out one possibility that would seem to appeal to Glaucon: noble sacrifice. According to Socrates, the many say that the good is pleasure, whereas refined human beings say that it is prudence. Neither definition is adequate; the many cannot say what distinguishes good from bad pleasures, and the few cannot say

what is the good thing that prudence helps us attain. But it is instructive that Socrates does not deny that the good, whatever it is, involves pleasure and prudence (see 506b2–6, 509a5–9, and cf. 581d2–3). Indeed, in describing the philosophers' study of the idea of the good, Socrates depicts them as supremely happy because they satisfy their *own* desires in this study (516c4–6, 521a3–4, 526e3); they are fulfilling rather than transcending themselves. When they philosophize, they believe that they have "emigrated to a colony on the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive" (519c, cf. 619d–e); their study is in fact accompanied by the greatest pleasures (583a1–3, 586a–b).

In light of this treatment of the good, we are led to consider the possibility that "the just things and the rest" are finally obtained not through a study that involves self-forgetting devotion but rather through one that is both driven and guided by an intense wish to perfect one's own soul. For, as Socrates has indicated, this study is the necessary step for acquiring genuine virtue. According to this view, the worth of the virtues depends on their being truly good for the human beings who possess them. But this seems to be at least partly at odds with Glaucon's attraction to the harsh and self-denying features of the city (especially 403b, 417b, 461e–62a). Glaucon, like Laches, seems inclined to subordinate "the good," understood as what is good for human beings, to virtue, understood as something choiceworthy apart from its effect on its possessors. On the other hand, as we have observed, Glaucon does not wholly subordinate his concern for his own good to his aspirations to a self-denying virtue; he insisted that Socrates show him that justice ultimately constitutes one's happiness and genuine flourishing (cf. Plato, *Laws* 663b, 664c). This concern for happiness appears again in Glaucon's reaction to the philosopher-kings' fate. When Socrates tells him that the philosophers will still have to descend into the cave in order to rule the city, he vigorously protests, saying that it would be unjust to force them to leave the "Isles of the Blessed" and thereby to "live a worse life when a better is possible" (519c–d; cf. 347e6, 464e3–7). It is true that Glaucon ultimately finds persuasive Socrates' claim that since the philosophers have been reared by the city, they owe the city their service (520b–d); he does not think that an individual's own happiness is the only relevant consideration.[8] His initial and untutored reaction, however, remains revealing. In stark contrast to the position he expressed in Book II, Glaucon's reaction discloses his doubts that justice, if it is choiceworthy, could demand that rulers relinquish their own greatest good to care for the city (cf. Lutz 1997, 578).

These, however, are only doubts; Glaucon acquiesces in Socrates' demand that the philosophers serve the city. Why does he? Glaucon may well be diverted

from a concern with his own happiness because he has no experience of a happiness that can constitute the peak of life or that can answer his longing, so evident in Book II, for a lasting and perhaps eternal happiness. If we consider those things that Socrates has said people call good—pleasure and prudence—to be the things ordinarily thought to bring happiness, we can see why especially Glaucon may find them deficient. A prudent and pleasant life may well strike him as incompatible with a serious and permanently satisfying happiness—remember that Laches could not conceive that an end prudently sought could be splendid like noble courage. To men who care about virtue and honor, a life whose goodness consists in obtaining pleasure or pursuing prudent ends appears most unsatisfying. Not only is the satisfaction provided by pleasure often fleeting; to the extent that enjoying pleasures does not test our uniquely human capacities, a life limited to pursuit of such things may seem base or at least mundane. Virtue in general and courage in particular appear similarly base or mundane if they are understood only as advancing these same goals. The willingness nobly to sacrifice may seem for these men to characterize a truly noble human life.

This helps to explain why courage looms so large for both Glaucon and Laches: noble courage seems to them to be the virtue that most tests a man and by which he most proves his virtue. But since, as we have seen, Glaucon's attraction to noble courage also contains a deep-seated wish for his own happiness, the question arises as to how noble courage might paradoxically appear to him as a way of finding the happiness that he cannot otherwise obtain. Insofar as Glaucon is drawn to a notion of virtue, and hence of courage, that demands great sacrifices, he may in fact be drawn to a notion of virtue that he thinks does not constitute his happiness but instead makes him *worthy* of a future happiness that is serious and lasting as neither pleasure nor prudence can be. He may, in fact, believe that gods confer an eternal happiness upon worthy human beings. Glaucon is very attracted by the thought that gods exist who reward men for their sacrifices and compensate them for their suffering. At the end of the dialogue, he eagerly agrees with Socrates' suggestion that if the just are not rewarded in this life, they will be in the next (612c–14a).[9]

To be sure, Glaucon's hope for rewards from gods is hardly prominent. But if his hope for providential gods lies in the background, this may be because it must lie there. If human beings who sacrifice their own good knew that the gods would reward them and relied upon this fact, this reliance would undermine their worthiness for any kind of reward from the gods, for to act with a view to anticipated rewards is to behave in a mercenary fashion.[10] The only possible "solution" for those who hope to achieve happiness from the gods by becoming worthy of their

favors is to suppress concern for their own good in the name of devotion to virtue for its own sake, that is, not because virtue is the true human good. This solution was perfectly evident in Glaucon's initial request to Socrates: he wanted Socrates to defend making the greatest sacrifices as good without reference to its "wages and consequences," that is, as sublimely satisfying, *and* as capable of making him supremely happy.

The solution just proposed, however, is highly problematic. We suggested that Glaucon and Laches are attracted to the notion of courage as an end in itself because they cannot conceive of ends that promise a sublime happiness. That others call those ends, such as pleasure or prudence, "happiness" does not alter the picture for them. They share the hope that virtue is more than a means to these ends. Their inability to embrace virtue as a means, however, does not mean that they can easily embrace it as an end in itself, as an object to which they should devote themselves fully, no matter what sacrifices it entails. As we have seen very powerfully in Glaucon, it is hard to put happiness altogether out of one's mind. Tempted by the possibility of virtue as an object of devotion while retaining in the back of his mind a wish for true happiness, Glaucon holds a conception of virtue that cannot withstand close scrutiny. That is, he seems not *really* to have stopped treating virtue as his own true good but instead to have transformed it from a direct route to that good to an indirect one. Having put blinders on, he is tempted by a self-transcending virtue with the secret hope that this will somehow lead to the perfect happiness for which he longs.

These considerations suggest that the only coherent resolution of the apparent tension between virtue and happiness lies in a conception of virtue the practice of which is intrinsically satisfying, so that virtue and happiness go together.[11] If happiness is to be not merely attained but *constituted by* the exercise of virtue, it cannot be merely pleasant; it must be noble, but in the sense of *fulfilling* rather than requiring the sacrifice of one's true good. But for this conception of virtue to be compelling to those, like Glaucon, who wish for noble virtue, virtue cannot be only a means to some further end, for that would make virtue utterly mundane. It seems to be through studying the idea of the good that one might arrive at such a conception of virtue.

That study, Socrates indicates, must be a "dialectical investigation" (532b). According to him, dialectics involves destroying hypotheses so that one can ultimately "give an account of a thing to himself and another" (534b, 533c–d).[12] To the degree that someone believes strongly in a given hypothesis, the dialectical investigation of it can cause pain; calm and delicacy are required. Seeking to arrive at a coherent account, he who investigates anything dialectically focuses on

the conflicts between rival explanations of it, trying to figure out which of the hypotheses best explains it or whether the conflicts point to a superior hypothesis not yet under consideration. He must be open-minded; he must aim to arrive at an account that satisfies "another" as well as himself, which is why dialectics is fundamentally a cooperative venture.

To study the good partly involves focusing dialectically, in concert with others, on the claims that render virtue appealing (cf. 532b–d with 514b–15a and 520b–c) and hence in part on the conflict, which besets the characters we have met, between courage as risking and courage as fulfilling oneself. As Socrates indicates when he first broaches the idea of the good, studying it enables one to understand the virtues properly and thus to act without misconceptions about what genuinely virtuous action entails. If we were correct in suggesting that genuine virtue is somehow constitutive of happiness, this means that studying the idea of the good dispels misconceptions that virtue is either a mere means to or beyond happiness.

But virtue is not *simply* constitutive of happiness. As we learned from our study of Nicias, human beings cannot guarantee to themselves consistently good results; indeed, he who tries to do so taints his own virtue. This suggests that the genuinely virtuous human being chooses in general to practice virtue because it fulfills him while fully aware that its exercise in particular instances may potentially harm him. Thus, when it comes to courage, even if genuine virtue is oriented by one's own true good, it may still sometimes require one to risk one's life; Socrates, after all, fought for Athens. But as we have just indicated, genuine virtue means running such risks in the full awareness that one has chosen the best course available for oneself under the circumstances and that one therefore deserves nothing further for one's actions; to express the same thought in moral terms, virtue truly is its own reward. This explains why all the virtues become "useful and beneficial" (505a) only as a consequence of studying the idea of the good; for those who profit from that study can then exercise their virtues with a view to the genuine benefits that virtue makes possible rather than in the (hidden) hope that doing so will allow them to secure further benefits. Clarity about the good is obtained at least in large part by dialectical conversations such as we saw in the *Laches*. Indeed, it might be just such "reasoned speeches" to which Socrates refers when he describes courage in the individual soul as preserving "through pains and pleasures what has been proclaimed by the reasoned speeches about that which is terrible and that which is not" (442c1–4).

If this account is correct, how are we to understand Socrates when he describes studying the idea of the good as disinterested contemplation of a higher

being? How can we reconcile this account with the account of the good as something simply beneficial for human beings? Providing a full answer to this question would take us farther afield than is possible or appropriate here. But one likely reason for the two accounts is that one serves a rhetorical purpose.[13] We should recall that Socrates' introduction of the idea of philosopher-kings forces him to defend philosophy—and philosophers—against the challenges lodged by Glaucon and Adeimantus that philosophers are held by many to be (or even actually are) useless or vicious (472a, 487c–d). Although Socrates and his young interlocutors have already agreed that philosophic rule, were it possible, would be best for the city (502d) before Socrates takes up the idea of the good, this latter discussion still addresses the same theme, at least in part. For in describing what the philosophers study or know (504e), Socrates stokes in his listeners a profound admiration not merely for how philosophy can benefit the city (473d, 499b) but also for philosophy itself. Indeed, if we turn to examine the effect of Socrates' high-minded portrait of the idea of the good, we find that it has an extraordinarily powerful effect on Glaucon. As Socrates describes the idea of the good, Glaucon declares that Socrates speaks of "overwhelming beauty," and when Socrates says that the good "isn't being but is still beyond being, exceeding it in dignity and power," Glaucon swears by Apollo and exclaims—"quite ridiculously," according to Socrates—"What a demonic excess" (509a–c). Glaucon's outburst suggests that he wholeheartedly endorses Socrates' poetic articulation of the idea of the good. Glaucon's evident astonishment here suggests that he may think he has finally found something sufficiently beautiful or awe-inspiring, immersion in which will satisfy his deepest longings and enable him to realize his greatest hopes.[14]

Glaucon thus seems to understand this study as splendid or sublime rather than as "useful and beneficial." At the very least, Socrates may encourage such a sublime view of the good for selfish reasons. Glaucon's embrace of it has clear benefits for Socrates and his students.[15] Glaucon will not ultimately turn to studying the idea of the good, that is, to philosophy,[16] but the mere suggestion of its self-transcendent character stokes in him a supreme admiration both for the study itself and for those who pursue it. And Socrates has a narrowly practical reason for encouraging such admiration in Glaucon. According to Xenophon, Socrates talks to Glaucon for the sake of the latter's younger brother, Plato (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III.6.1). We have seen that Glaucon greatly admires actions that demand terrible suffering and even the sacrifice of one's life. For him to believe that the study of the good involves a similar transcendence moderates his longing for these painful and dangerous activities. He thus comes to admire

the contemplative instead of or as much as the heroically courageous life, and he thus perhaps becomes less inclined to prevent others, including his brother, from devoting themselves to the former rather than the latter.[17]

But there is also evidence that Socrates' high-minded account is not merely to moderate the extreme tendencies of Glaucon or men like him for his own benefit. Indeed, Socrates' description of the study of the good as somehow both self-transcendent and self-fulfilling may have a crucially inspiring and beneficial effect on those who hear it. Glaucon provides a helpful example of why this might be. As we have seen in Book II, Glaucon's doubts about the goodness of justice enable him to describe in extremely vivid detail the attractiveness of the goods available through injustice, particularly the freedom to satisfy all one's desires all the time. We might even suspect from the force of his account that Glaucon himself is powerfully tempted by a life devoted to satisfying such desires. In his infatuation, however, with the study of the idea of the good or the first cause of things, Glaucon seems to forget about such desires. The example of Glaucon suggests that the development of an appreciation, at the very least, of philosophy seems to be accompanied by a certain noble self-forgetting that could in the more philosophically promising young help one turn one's mind and efforts toward the arduous studies Socrates goes on to claim are part of the philosophic education (503e–4a; but cf. 612c–13b).

To be sure (cf. Annas 1981, 209n7), Socrates describes philosophers as supremely happy and fulfilled by their immersion in the study of the good. But Glaucon's delight at Socrates' high-minded description of it and his embrace of a regime that requires enormous self-overcoming suggests that this latter interpretation is the one to which the young are attracted. Indeed, in Book VII, Socrates indicates that novices may benefit from having a somewhat distorted image of a philosopher's activity. There Socrates describes young men who misuse dialectics by trying to refute the arguments made by their fathers and by the city about what is just and noble (538c–39b). He notes that when these young men refute the city's claims about the just and noble things, they become "outlaws" unless they subsequently find the truly just and noble things. Evidently, if they see problems with the city's conceptions of justice and nobility but do not discover the true alternative conceptions, they ignore the law in pursuit of their own narrow interests; they begin to think that there really is nothing just or noble and therefore that the law should not stand between them and the satisfaction of all their desires.

According to Socrates, the most serious problem that these debunkers of justice and nobility face—the reason that Socrates tells Glaucon he should pity them

(539a)—is the harm that they do to themselves. Having rejected justice and nobility because they see the city's teachings about these things as flawed, they fail to see the degree to which thinking itself might be a noble activity, particularly insofar as it aims to grasp not merely one's own narrow good but also the true human good and true human virtue as such. Socrates' account of these debunkers suggests that they may fail to appreciate the degree to which the true goods are not the most narrowly self-serving goods but the truly human and hence universal goods of the soul. For those among the debunkers who may be well-suited for philosophy, this is a devastating error. Rather than turning to think about the nature of the whole and ascending from the realm of opinion to knowledge, they give up on thinking altogether, believing that the only goods of life are those that satisfy their own mundane desires and thus failing ever to discover wisdom about the virtues and the true satisfaction that philosophy can provide.[18]

By relinquishing their concern for justice and nobility without adequately confronting the degree to which thinking or philosophizing appears to be self-transcendent, the debunkers also very likely fail to understand something crucial about the virtues themselves. They are likely unaware of the extent to which they themselves are still enthralled by ordinary civic opinions. The sophist Thrasymachus, whose opinion about justice Socrates examines in Book I of the *Republic,* illustrates just how deeply rooted such opinions can be. Claiming that justice is nothing more than the advantage of the stronger (338c), Thrasymachus in effect denies that justice exists. Yet he becomes terribly indignant when he thinks that Socrates is not arguing fairly (336b–d). His anger implies that he believes that Socrates should be bound by concerns of fairness whether or not they are to his advantage. Despite his apparent denial of the existence of justice, Thrasymachus proves to be in its grip. If even this impressive sophist remains bound by the same opinions he dismisses, how much truer is this of other men?

Socrates' twofold account of the study of the idea of the good and of philosophy in general responds to this difficulty. The picture of philosophy as a transcendent activity enables youths who encounter dialectics to take seriously the longings for some kind of noble life even after they have come to see difficulties with the city's teaching about nobility. Philosophy understood as transcendent prevents young students of dialectics from becoming debunking "outlaws." Even as they come to question what the city teaches them is noble, these youths do not simply reject the existence of the noble as such; this makes it possible for them to discover what it truly is. Socrates' account of the philosopher's highest activity as intellecting "the good itself" may help to preserve in the souls both of youths who encounter dialectics and perhaps of proto-philosophers the hope that the

truest goods are admirable or high and help them remain steadfast on what we will see is often a difficult journey.

COURAGE IN THE CAVE

Socrates' account of the idea of the good suggests that the courage that is associated with a truly virtuous soul and exercised with a view to that soul's good cannot come into being until the virtuous person in question comes to terms with the opinion at the heart of ordinary, noble courage—namely, that risking or sacrificing oneself can be both the peak of life and a means to one's own happiness. But coming to terms with this opinion is no easy task. We have already seen that Laches is reluctant to face this tension at all and that Glaucon embraces an inadequate resolution to it. Indeed, when Socrates describes real education in his famous image of the cave, he stresses its difficulty. Real education is not a course of study that everyone can follow, if only because, according to Socrates' account, it is at least in part a hard and even painful process. For this reason, as we will see, it requires courage. But the courage that is necessary to persevere in education of course cannot be the genuine courage that one acquires as a result of education. So it seems that confronting the opinions at the heart of ordinary courage, which confrontation is necessary for genuine courage to develop, may, paradoxically, depend on ordinary courage.

It may seem strange to characterize the pursuit of education as requiring courage at all. After all, in pursuing education, one neither puts one's life at risk nor attempts anything especially noble, and we ordinarily understand courage to be exercised when one risks oneself for some noble end. We must, however, recall that such criteria are not necessarily the correct ones for determining the nature and scope of courage. As we have learned from examining Socrates' account of the idea of the good, he who possesses a coherent conception of virtue will know that its exercise is both good in itself and as a means to his own true good. We should recall that in the *Laches,* Socrates indicates that courage includes steadfastness in pursuit of one's own true good. When Socrates was guiding Laches as to what a good definition of courage would be, he indicated that it should include not only the courage of the hoplite but also the courage of those who are courageous toward "pains and fears" and "desires and pleasures," and he included among his examples of courageous individuals those who face sickness and poverty (*Laches* 191d–e).

Still, even if it is legitimate to speak of those who pursue some good for themselves in the face of fears and pains or desires and pleasures as courageous, does

this accurately characterize those who pursue philosophy? Socrates repeatedly describes the philosophic nature as, among other things, courageous (486b, 487a, 490c, 494b, 503b–4a, 535b). But the question remains why courage must be part of a philosophic nature. Is the simple desire for wisdom not sufficient to propel one toward philosophy? To answer this question we must turn to Socrates' image of true education and the path to philosophy—namely, the cave. In examining this image, we must keep in mind that just as Socrates' high-minded depiction of the idea of the good seemed at least in part designed to appeal to non-philosophers, like Glaucon, the same might be true of his depiction of philosophic natures as courageous: if non-philosophers recognize the philosopher as courageous, they will admire him and tolerate his presence in the city. But just as there was also a non-rhetorical purpose to the discussion of the good, Socrates' image of the cave suggests that there may be a non-rhetorical reason for calling philosophic natures courageous; courage may be especially important in the initial stages for many, if not necessarily all, of those who embark on the quest for wisdom.

Socrates calls his image of the cave an image of "our nature in its education and want of education" (514a). The cave represents political society as such, whose inhabitants Socrates claims are benighted. According to his image, all human beings are born into a cave and chained from childhood to face its back. In the cave, certain "human beings" who seem to be the founders or rulers of political society hold up "all sorts of artifacts . . . and statues of men" (514c) in front of a fire that projects shadows onto the back wall. The rest of us see only the "shadows" of these artifacts, which we mistake for the truth about the nature of things (515c). To become enlightened, the image suggests that we must extricate ourselves from our bonds, turn around to examine the artifacts whose shadows we generally believe are real, and ultimately escape from the cave into the light that shines at the end of its long tunnel.

What, however, are these artifacts whose shadows are projected on the cave's wall? And why are we shown them? The following references provide crucial clues: Socrates describes some of the artifacts as "statues of men" (515c), he identifies certain shadows as "of the just" (517d), and he claims that the cave is populated by "phantoms" of the noble, just, and good things (520c). Taken together, these statements help to explain how the cave affects human beings. The artifacts appear to be the models that each regime establishes of what constitutes a just and noble life (cf. Annas 1981, 256; Klosko 1986, 92). Different societies project different models: Sparta holds up warriors as models; America, rugged individualists. Nietzsche's "One Thousand and One Goals" from *Thus Spake Zarathus-*

tra beautifully illustrates Socrates' image by speaking of the different models characteristic of different peoples: some "speak the truth and handle bow and arrow well," some "honor father and mother and follow their will to the root of one's soul," and some "practice loyalty and, for the sake of loyalty, risk honor and blood even for evil and dangerous things" (1982, 171). According to Socrates' image, as long as we remain in the cave—benighted—we accept these models uncritically, believing that they are the true models of human perfection. Put simply, the image of the cave suggests that each city educates its citizens in distorted notions of virtue and that it is only by examining these and thereby coming to understand them as distortions that one acquires a true education (see 515d–e, 532c–d, 538c–e).

But Socrates indicates that turning around to examine the models and leaving the cave is a difficult process. Socrates describes one who is led out of the cave and who comes to grasp part of the truth as "in pain" and as "dazzled" by the light outside the cave, which represents the truth about the nature of things. For this reason he is at first unwilling, Socrates says, to believe that turning toward the light has led him to be closer to the truth. The suffering inspires a wish to return to the cave and its comforting illusions (515c–d; see also 504a, 518c–d, and *Theaetetus* 151a–b), for it shocks the newly liberated individual to discover that what he always held to be true is illusory. Rather than remain in the light, he is inclined to "flee" from it and to turn back to familiar things. According to Socrates, it takes a great deal of time and patience to be able eventually to "endure" looking at the light and not its shadows (518c).[19]

Even in the city in speech, the best and most just city, we can see why questioning the city's teachings is painful. First, Socrates clearly indicates that even the best city is a cave: he says that it will be very difficult for the philosophers to descend from the "Isles of the Blessed" to take their turn ruling in the city because it will be hard for them to adjust to the darkness of the cave and the "phantoms" of the noble, just, and good things that pervade it (520b–d). But what are the phantoms and artifacts of *this* city? The most prominent one is undoubtedly the noble lie that Socrates and Glaucon agree the guardians must be told. It is not hard to see why it would be painful to confront this lie, which, we recall, teaches that the city is the common mother of the citizens. Recognizing the truth behind the noble lie isn't just painful because one realizes that one has been duped. What is more important is the meaning of the lie's content, for whether or not the city actually *is* the common mother of the citizens has serious implications for how one should live. What turns on this question is the degree to which the citizens are united, that is, whether or not they have a common good akin to that

of a family (463c–64b). For the existence of such a common good—indeed, "a community of pleasures and pains"—is, we have seen, what makes it possible for the guardians to love the city and to be eager "to do what they believe to be advantageous to the city" (412e, 413c). If, however, the premise that makes this eagerness possible is false, the question of *why* they should look to the city's advantage becomes very pressing.

Still, this is not yet to explain what is painful about pressing this question. If the city's teachings, because they lead the guardians to act against their own true good, are not merely illusory but in fact detrimental, would not seeing through this illusion be liberating rather than painful? Why might it be painful for a citizen to confront the possibility that his own happiness is more important to him than the city's welfare? If the city were merely imposing views at which citizens chafe, then it would indeed be simply liberating to be freed from them. But Socrates' indication that confronting the city's most important views is painful suggests that citizens are in fact attracted to the city's teaching, that they are willing participants in their own deception; this means that to question civic teachings on virtue is painful because it means risking losing a belief that they hold very dear.

What we have seen in Glaucon illustrates why the possibility of devotion to the city can be so appealing. Glaucon is attracted to a life that consists in self-forgetting or even sacrifice, which he regards as transcendent and noble. As we have argued, though, there is much at stake in the longing for nobility. As Glaucon's assault on justice revealed, he believes that transcendent actions (if they can be shown to be choiceworthy) are bound up with the greatest human good, with the most profound, perhaps eternal, happiness. It is thus not hard to see how his whole world could be shaken by the possibility that the sort of noble devotion he longs for is confused. For it would mean that the sublimely satisfying or eternal happiness for which he truly longs is impossible.[20]

If, however, scrutinizing the illusions of one's cave is painful, why would anyone wish to do it? Perhaps it is better to remain in the cave, deluded but happy or at least comfortable. This may well be the case for some human beings. But to remain in the cave is not an ideal option; it is chosen only by those who never truly and passionately confront the alternative. Those who are strong or healthy enough to embrace the truth, Socrates indicates, are better off doing so—and something within everyone testifies that, among human beings, those who can and do embrace the truth are *best* off for doing so. According to Socrates, the desire for the truth is present in all human beings. In the course of explaining to Glaucon in Book II why gods do not lie, he says that human beings as well as

gods "hate the true lie." When Glaucon professes puzzlement at hearing this, Socrates responds by saying that no one "voluntarily wishes to lie about the most sovereign things to what is most sovereign in himself" (382a). His claim at first seems very dubious: people appear to lie to themselves all the time. Socrates, however, does not deny that people lie to themselves. Rather, he claims that at least on important matters ("the most sovereign things"), people do not "voluntarily wish" to deceive themselves; to the extent that they do lie to themselves on such matters, they do so involuntarily (382a–b).

Socrates' formulation here is admittedly mysterious. But to begin to understand what he has in mind, we should consider first why we might ever wish to lie to ourselves. In those cases where we do, is it not because there is something that we suspect is true but that we wish were otherwise because the alternative is too painful to handle? In such circumstances it is not that we consciously persuade ourselves of the opposite of what we *know* is the case—we cannot make ourselves believe, for example, that unicorns exist. We can, however, lie to ourselves in the midst of uncertainty. When we lie to ourselves, we wish to hide from ourselves evidence that contradicts what we desperately want to believe. It is one thing, for instance, to seek to get to the bottom of a disease that we know can be cured. In the case of an incurable cancer, however, we might ignore apparent signs of it because to confirm suspicions that we are terminally ill would be to subject ourselves to pain that we cannot relieve—the disease will strike when it strikes, we might say, so why subject ourselves to the pain of anticipating its onset? In such a situation, it does seem reasonable to say that we lie to ourselves.

But it also seems reasonable to say what is consistent with Socrates' claim or what follows from it: that in this situation we lie to ourselves only as the result of an *involuntary* wish. If no one voluntarily wishes to lie about "the most sovereign things to what is most sovereign in himself"—this means that human beings wish to lie to themselves only when what is at stake is so important to them that it compels belief in lies, that is, they are incapable of any response other than to lie to themselves. Fear for our survival is not the only fear that creates this involuntary wish. It is also generated by the fear of discovering that opinions crucial to our happiness, such as the belief in the existence and providence of gods or in the faithfulness of a lover, are false. The wish to lie to ourselves may be reasonably called involuntary if it is a response one makes when placed in an insupportable position, one in which one's best option seems to be embracing a lie of significant moment.[21] This is not to interpret an "involuntary wish" merely as a wish for the best of all possible circumstances. While all human beings might wish for the best for themselves, human beings clearly differ in their constitutions; some are able

to accept truths about their circumstances from which others recoil. The question is whether the latter human beings agree that the former are superior *in principle,* that is, whether they wish they had the strength or psychic health not to flee the truth. If so, then one can truly conclude that the wish to lie to oneself is involuntary—akin to a drug addict's succumbing to his desire for drugs despite his best efforts to resist it.

Socrates' claim that human beings hate true lies thus seems to be a claim that, insofar as human beings are healthy, they wish not to be deluded. The difficulty is that since we all begin, to use Socrates' language, in a cave, we all begin ignorant and thus at least partly unhealthy. We thus might often wish—although involuntarily, as the result of a weakness that the better part of us despises—not to confront matters that challenge our greatest hopes and the things closest to our hearts. It is thus not surprising if in one's initial forays, and perhaps in later ones as well, one wishes to return to the comforts of the cave. For these reasons we seem, in order to acquire the wisdom needed for genuine courage, to need ordinary courage, the spirited willingness that enables one to face a prospective evil because one believes that flight is unseemly, or because one refuses to be the kind of person who cannot face the truth. Confronting our familiar and cherished opinions is akin to taking an unpleasant medicine for the soul, and human beings need courage to take it (see 604c–d, 606a; cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 479b–80d and 521d–22b, and *Sophist* 230d–e).

One might object, however, that the analogy between psychic and physical health actually militates against the claim that courage is necessary for the health of one's soul. Would not someone who becomes sick and who knows of a cure for his illness eagerly seek it out? Why would he need courage in addition to his knowledge? The question answers itself: to the extent that he truly knows his situation, he would not seem to need courage. But when it comes to psychic illness, one must face the pain both of seeing one's true self as deficient and of being aware that one lacks knowledge of the proper remedy. A certain courage is therefore required to face this fact and risk venturing into the unknown. One simply does not know that psychic health will be attained by following a path other than the one laid out as a model in one's cave. To question that model is thus not to seek a known cure but to embark on an uncertain journey at the end of which one might find oneself unhappier than before. We might say, then, that a spirited—and thus to some degree irrational—courage is needed, at least initially, to help human beings question their most sovereign opinions and overturn the cherished foundations of their lives.

COURAGE AND THE PATH TO PHILOSOPHY

How is it that a spirited and irrational courage can help human beings dispel their ignorance? Is it not the tendency of spiritedness to make us cling to our own opinions rather than to examine them? As we have seen, spiritedness manifests itself most prominently as anger, which fills us with a sense of righteousness and therefore increases our belief in our opinions. In light of this, how could spiritedness contribute to the rigorous examination of one's own opinions? How could a spirited courage be an asset rather than a liability in ascending from the cave?

Rather than being simply the obstacle to reflection that Socrates at times presents it as being, spiritedness may in some cases help to propel one out of the cave in two different but related ways.[22] First, if the moral concerns at the heart of spiritedness can lead people tenaciously to defend what they take to be the elements of their honor or worthiness, it can lead them to want not to be fools who are deceived by the cave's images; anyone who cares about honor and dignity would consider it slavish to persist in remaining so deluded. Spiritedness, then, can help to level the obstacles blocking ascent from the cave. Second, spiritedness can inspire ("inspirit") one with a sense of grandeur that enables one to persist in a project despite the difficulties encountered along the way. If it takes the right form, the very thing that maintains people in their illusions can help to overcome them.

The first useful element of spiritedness may be a part of the hatred (*misein*) of lies that Socrates says is part of a philosophic nature (485c, 490b). To call the philosophic nature's disposition toward lies a hatred suggests that it may be spirited. Socrates does not speak of wanting simply to expunge lies as though they were merely discomforting—say, like a blister. To describe someone as hating lies can suggest that he is angry at them (see also Adeimantus' statement at 366d7–8). To understand what it could mean to "hate a lie," consider what is implied in the Christian saying that one should hate the sin but love the sinner. Is this not an injunction to direct one's anger at the sin rather than at the sinner?

Socrates' discussion of misology, or the hatred of reason, in the *Phaedo* illustrates this kind of angry hatred in a context that bears on the hatred of lies. In the *Phaedo* Socrates compares misology to misanthropy. He says that one develops a hatred of reason for the same reason that one develops a hatred of people. According to Socrates, one becomes a misanthrope from being deceived by people after placing excessive trust in them (89d–e). And when one is deceived by many

people many times, one grows to hate all people. Just as Socrates implies that one can come to hate reason because the trust that one has placed in it has been repeatedly disappointed, one could also come to hate previously cherished opinions that one learns are lies. If one has seen many of one's opinions overturned as lies, according to this argument, one would become highly suspicious of and treat with an angry hatred any opinion that appears to be a lie.

One who hates lies, then, may hate them in a spirited, angry fashion. The question is whether such hatred can actually help someone make progress in ridding himself of lies. It can be useful to the extent that one's hatred is directed not at those who disseminate the lie but at oneself for being duped by the lie. When so directed, it can fuel one's efforts to eradicate the lie from the soul (cf. *Sophist* 230c–d). This kind of response to lies seems particularly characteristic of someone who cares about virtue and honor. A man who prizes his virtue will, upon suspecting that he has been deceived by lies, not let up until he has examined his beliefs thoroughly in order to test their adequacy. Now, in attempting to eradicate lies from his soul, such an individual may not make the attempt in the conscious belief that it is best to do so; he may be infused with a blinding determination to break through the bonds of conventional opinion so that he will not be a dupe rather than so that he can have what is genuinely good for himself. But the virtue of this anger is that it can be the source of the courage to undertake examinations that might appear beyond one's reach, to face possibilities that may undermine all that one cherishes, and to resist the temptation to return to the lie (and thus to the cave) upon discovering unpleasant truths.

Of course, an angry hatred of lies is hardly the most obvious mark of a philosophic nature. As we have seen, anger tends to blind us, and it is therefore more of an obstacle than an asset to learning. Insofar as Socrates' mention of a hatred of lies can be interpreted as a spirited hatred of lies, he may be describing something that occurs very early on in the philosophic experience. Or he may be articulating a portrait of a philosophic nature that someone like Glaucon, who seems to have had this very reaction upon coming to see the problems with the city's view of justice, will recognize. But a hatred of lies is not the only spirited quality that Socrates indicates may be present in a philosophic nature. Socrates also speaks of the importance of "youthful fire" and of "magnificence," both of which have spirited roots (see 486a, 487a, 490c, 503c–d). They differ, however, from the hatred of lies because they add a "positive" dimension absent from hatred. They contribute not just to destroying the obstacles in one's path but to forging along it. Socrates does not explain precisely what he means by "youthful fire," but it would seem at least to include a courageous daring to seek out and grapple with challenging arguments.

Magnificence seems to be the "positive" spirited quality that is most likely to help guide one out of the cave. In Book III, magnificence emerged as a disposition toward greatness that arises when spirited men receive an education in beauty. Having developed a love for beautiful things as well as a lively sense of human capacities, they become magnificent and seek to perform noble deeds, at least in part to express the beauty they sense within their own souls. Magnificence thus inspires one to seek honor as a testimony to one's own excellence. Because of the connection between it and noble *deeds,* it—like spiritedness in general—may not seem so useful for real progress in a philosophic education. The famed Alcibiades was surely magnificent, but he was ultimately incapable of suspending his political aspirations and turning wholly to philosophy. Socrates in the *Republic* articulates the difficulties with magnificence when he explains why someone with a magnificent nature may be especially tempted to remain in the cave. Since such an individual is likely to be "first among all in everything," he will likely be "mindlessly full of pretension and empty conceit" (494b–d).[23] For this reason, he is unlikely to accept that "he has no intelligence in him although he needs it" and that such intelligence "is not to be acquired except by slaving for its acquisition" (494d). Someone whose magnificence becomes self-satisfaction is a poor candidate for the most important kind of education, for he will be incapable of accepting that he is radically deficient and therefore in need of serious education.

But magnificence is not inextricably connected to the ambition to perform the noble deeds that win public honor. In his discussion of philosophic natures in Book VI, we have seen that Socrates attributes to them magnificence as expressed in an understanding that does not hold "that human life is anything great"; such an understanding is "endowed" not only with magnificence but also with "the contemplation of all time and all being" (486a). This form of magnificence, Socrates teaches, is particularly useful and perhaps even essential for philosophic endeavors. As described, it seems to aim at something like what earlier dazzled Glaucon (who agrees enthusiastically with Socrates' account of a magnificent soul here): contemplation of the idea of the good understood as the first cause of all things. Indeed, in the *Phaedo,* Socrates says that as a young man he himself was immersed in questions about the first cause of things precisely because he believed that it would be "magnificent to know the cause of everything" (96a–d).[24] This kind of magnificence expresses itself as the refusal to bow before anything not out of anger or indignation but out of the conviction that one is capable of grasping the whole, that grasping the whole would be participating in some way in something eternal, and that one can thereby ascend to the grandest heights of which rational beings

are capable. The magnificent individual may be said to believe that those who successfully escape from the cave really do inhabit something like the "Isles of the Blessed" (519c), and the prospect of joining them excites his constant efforts.[25]

But however useful certain forms of spiritedness may be for a philosophic quest, it is not clear what role they play in the soul of a full-fledged philosopher. For whereas the hatred of lies bespeaks a desire not to be bested—if only by one's lesser self—and philosophic magnificence denotes an aspiration toward grandeur, it is not clear that the full-fledged philosopher shares these concerns. The distance between the philosophers and other people emerges from a consideration of Glaucon's reaction to Socrates' description of the philosophically magnificent man's attitude toward death. Glaucon agrees with Socrates, saying that it is "impossible" that human life "seem[s] anything great" to the magnificent man who contemplates all time and all being and that, for this reason, such a man will "not in the least" believe that "death is something terrible" (486a–b). But why does he readily agree to these claims, which are surely hard to accept? Has he truly come to view all of human life, as they say, philosophically? This seems most unlikely in light of his openness at the end of the *Republic* to Socrates' claim that the soul is immortal (608d) and that gods reward and punish men after death (613a).

Rather, what explains Glaucon's agreement here is the fact that it is solicited in the immediate wake of Socrates' teaching that philosophers spend their most precious time not with mundane and temporary things but in the realm of the eternal Ideas, of which tangible things are mere instances (475e–80a). Adopting the loftiest of perspectives, Glaucon seems to think that a sufficiently magnificent man who communes with the Ideas can somehow so transcend the world of coming-into-being and passing-away that death really does not seem terrible to him—why would passing away matter to someone who gazes upon such magnificent things as the permanent Ideas? That Glaucon's reaction is mediated by the immediately preceding discussion of the Ideas appears even more clearly when we contrast it with the reaction of the Spartan Megillus in a similar context in Plato's *Laws*. Upon hearing the Athenian Stranger say that "the affairs of human beings are not worthy of great seriousness," Megillus very gravely censures him for "belittling our human race in every respect" (803b–c). Glaucon, by contrast, is so transported by the idea of the Ideas that at this moment he himself evinces contempt for human things; he has come a long way from his initial wish to see justice vindicated in the human world.

The question is whether Glaucon could maintain his lofty attitude toward death upon considered reflection. His reaction to Socrates' later claim that the

soul is immortal (612Cff) suggests that he could not. Rather, his "superhuman" attitude seems bound up with a belief that, when he identifies with philosophers contemplating the Ideas, he has transcended the human plane. This suggests that, while magnificence as manifested in the contemplation of all time and all being may serve as a great inspiration for the pursuit of wisdom, it may also distort one's perception: it can so hallow the objects of contemplation that one loses sight of one's own situation and feels hallowed oneself. Glaucon bears witness to the possibility that magnificence can lead one to dismiss human things as unserious not as the result of real insight but from the belief that philosophic contemplation elevates one to such a noble level that one is immune to the concerns of most other human beings, including the concern with mortality.[26]

For if Glaucon were truly to dismiss all human things as lacking seriousness, he would have to include himself and his own activities. He does not. That Glaucon and Socrates, when they agree on how human affairs appear to the magnificent man, do not share the same perspective becomes clear later when they discuss what happens to "Philosophy" when people ill suited for it engage in it (536a–c). After expressing a sort of moral outrage at the prospect of bringing the wrong sort of people to philosophy, Socrates apologizes for having been "ridiculously affected just now": "I forgot that we were playing and spoke rather intensely. For, as I was talking I looked at Philosophy and, seeing her undeservingly spattered with mud, I seem to have been vexed and said what I had to say too seriously as though my spiritedness were aroused against those who were responsible." So highly does Glaucon regard "Philosophy" that he, by contrast, does not think that Socrates has spoken with sufficient force: "No, by Zeus, that's not the way you seemed to me"—his oath suggests that he thinks a *more* spirited response to the situation Socrates described is appropriate. However Socrates was when he was younger, as a mature philosopher he seems unable to muster more than a pale imitation of spiritedness. In fact, it seems that spiritedness plays no role in the delivery of the speech just quoted: Socrates apologizes for coming to the aid of Philosophy "*as though* my spiritedness were aroused" (536c1–5; emphasis added). However important, however good Socrates may think that the activity of philosophizing is, he does not regard it as "serious" in the way that Glaucon does. If he agrees with the Athenian Stranger that "the affairs of human beings are not worthy of great seriousness," it is not because he looks down on them, as Glaucon does, with spirited contempt.

Rather, Socrates seems to have transcended the ordinary concern with worthiness with which spiritedness is intertwined. Although we cannot trace here the course of events that led to this, we have seen a—perhaps *the*—crucial reason

for Socrates' highly unorthodox understanding of human virtue: the opinions underlying the ordinary notion of virtue seem unable to withstand the dialectical investigation of the good. Socrates' conversations with Laches and Glaucon in particular have revealed at least some of the difficulties with these opinions. At the core of the belief in noble virtue held by Laches and Glaucon seems to be a confusion about whether, on the one hand, one becomes virtuous simply in forgetting oneself and one's own good or whether, on the other hand, one becomes by virtue of this forgetting worthy of the greatest good. If no virtue that rests on confused opinions is genuine, then genuine courage can come into being only from confronting this tension at the heart of ordinary courage. One result of this confrontation appears to be the recognition that genuine virtue must be rooted in the awareness that courage is a virtue only when one "preserves the opinion" that what is truly terrible is not pursuing the true human good (cf. 442c).

Genuine courage may not require spiritedness at all because the pursuit of the true human good does not require spiritedness.[27] That spirited rather than genuine courage may be unnecessary in an educated soul is suggested in Book III by an analogy that Socrates offers ostensibly to explain political courage (429c–e). Socrates says that the guardians' courage consists in "preserving" the city's opinions about what is truly terrible. But to illustrate the character of this preserving, he offers a strange example. He compares the guardians' preserving to the way in which properly prepared material preserves the dye with which it has been colored: if the guardians have been well prepared by their education, the opinions handed down by the city will stick to them too. The difficulty with the analogy is, however, that the material does not actively have to work to retain the dye. Socrates' analogy raises questions about whether the guardians' education has sufficiently prepared them to receive the legislated opinions, for if it did, no "work" on their part would be necessary. But work is necessary. Socrates calls the guardians courageous because they have a part in them—spiritedness—that preserves, through everything, the city's opinions. They must work at preserving the city's opinions, aided by the spirited opinion that directs them to be guided not by what is good for them but by what is noble. The guardians require spiritedness to "preserve" the city's opinions because they could not otherwise hang onto them; they could not follow the city's dictates on the basis of the belief that doing so is best for them.

If, then, the guardians' courage does not precisely fit the analogy, might something else? The silent alternative to which the analogy points is that of the soul that *does* preserve "opinions," as a material preserves colorfast dye. Because opinions are vulnerable to corruption, only wisdom can be preserved so thoroughly.

Socrates' analogy thus suggests that only the best education—not merely a civic education—can prepare certain human beings to assimilate wisdom fully, so that no active preserving is necessary.[28] The beneficiaries of this education do not "cast out" what they know in the face of "pains and pleasures and desires and fears" (429c). This is not to say that the philosopher never experiences fears or never hopes to avoid evils. But having examined the opinions that derail human beings from the steady and single-minded pursuit of their true good, he does not forget that success in this pursuit ultimately turns on his own efforts. He does not succumb to the spirited temptation to "forget" his own good (and what he knows) in order to secure it. One could object to this suggestion by arguing that some pains and fears are so powerful that spiritedness is needed to prevent a philosopher from being blinded by them even momentarily. If this is true, it means that at the moment the philosopher loses his clarity and enlists spiritedness to regain it, his soul is not harmonious; he has lost sight of his true good. This is surely a plausible scenario, but it is inconsistent at least with Plato's depiction of *the* genuine philosopher—Socrates (see especially 536c).

To say that the wise individual leaves behind whatever spiritedness he had by nature is not to imply that he does not need strength or toughness, that is, that his character and understanding result entirely from intellectual achievements. Rather, his strength or toughness seems to be interwoven into his very nature, just as, for example, a low pain threshold or an iron stomach is.[29] This appears from Socrates' discussion of the guardians' initial education in Book III, where Socrates warns against exposing the guardians to too much traditional flute music. The problem with this music, he says, is that it tends to charm the spirit and then to dissolve it, cutting out "the sinews" from the soul and making it "a feeble warrior" (411b). Socrates thereby implies that every soul needs "sinews" so that it can fight fiercely against the difficulties and obstacles that it encounters. This is especially true for daring souls (cf. 375a6–8). If the path to philosophy can be hard and painful, even a soul with many other gifts needs, at least at the outset, to have a little of the warrior in it.

However important toughness is, though, the essence of genuine courage remains self-sufficient knowledge, which produces an impressive steadiness in the face of fears. Socrates, as we saw from the *Laches,* possesses this steadiness.[30] As he demonstrated to Laches at the battle of Delium, Socrates can withstand great pressure without losing his head. Socrates is also famous for facing his own death well (*Crito* 43b–c, *Phaedo* 118a), including by not fleeing from his imminent execution when his friend Crito encouraged him to do so. According to what he tells Crito, he cannot live well outside Athens, so it is better for him to die than

to flee (46b–c and 53b–54c). This hardly means that he thought death was a good thing (cf. *Apology* 40c–41c with 39e4–5, 31c–d, 35a7–8, 41c4 and *Phaedo* 64a), but he had the courage to recognize that it was better for him than the available alternatives (see also *Apology* 38c–d, 41d2–4 and *Crito* 53d7–9). His courage is thus the courage initially sketched in the *Laches* and developed in the *Republic*; it is, as Nicias initially suspected, a "certain wisdom" (*Laches* 194d). This wisdom does not provide the guarantees that Nicias wants, but it enables one to know, for example, that calmly retreating in battle is the best means of securing one's well-being. The genuinely courageous individual faces evils not out of high-minded hopes or angry pride but out of the awareness that he cannot avoid confronting all evils; rather, he knows that the best he can do when forced to face evils is rely on his own wits and efforts to secure his well-being; he expects no external assistance. A philosopher's courage ultimately depends, then, on the knowledge that the wise and happy human being always pursues what is best for himself in the circumstances—though his courage includes an innate toughness that enables the philosopher to accept the limitations that this implies. In this way, a philosopher, in a certain sense, always pursues what is good. For a philosopher the greatest evil, or what is truly terrible, is not to do what he can to pursue the best life.

CONCLUSION

The Promise of Courage

Despite the differences in their treatments of courage, the *Laches* and the *Republic* together yield a single teaching about courage: courage properly understood is both the cause and consequence of wisdom. It is the consequence of wisdom because, as the *Laches* shows, the tensions that Socrates exposes at the heart of heroic or noble courage establish a coherent standard for courage that is genuinely a virtue. Only once one acquires wisdom about the proper standards for guiding courageous action can one determine and exercise genuine courage. At the same time, the *Laches* and the *Republic* also raise the paradoxical possibility that it is the cause of wisdom—that is, that acquiring the wisdom needed for courage itself requires courage. By facilitating the pursuit of wisdom, courage as traditionally understood enables one to acquire the wisdom that makes genuine courage possible.

Of course, this means that the ordinary courage exhibited by unwise human beings—a sort of precursor version of genuine courage—is deficient. The character of its deficiency is brought to light in the course of Socrates' education of the guardians in the *Republic*. The regime of the *Republic* teaches its guardians that their courage is noblest when it is wholly concerned with the city's good. But Socrates' conversations in the *Laches* and the *Republic* show that this self-understanding is confused: upon critical examination, it reveals a wish that virtue can consist both in self-forgetting or self-sacrifice and in the greatest good for a human being. Plato's representations of this human problem—Laches, Nicias, and Glaucon—all manifest this confusion. But perhaps even more revealing and troubling is their equally human unwillingness to look their notions of courage squarely in the face to learn whether or not they are sensible.

Although these characters can be made to recognize that their arguments are deficient, they are unwilling and hence unable to get to the bottom of those deficiencies. Indeed, they all appear to lack the ordinary courage needed to take on risky intellectual endeavors. They thus fail to learn that courage is genuinely a virtue and hence genuinely noble only when exercised by those who see clearly that human beings cannot consistently view courage as a virtue unless it is part of an individual's own human flourishing. Averting their eyes from this leads them to hope ignobly that self-forgetting action (insofar as this is possible) will somehow redound to their benefit, which hope, as we have seen, has both theoretical and practical consequences. In lacking the courage to clarify their arguments, moreover, we have also seen that they lack a natural hardiness or toughness of soul that makes it possible for them to scrutinize their own views of courage. They are unwilling to reflect on how much they hope to gain from courage. Were they able to do so, they might learn that to the extent that courage is a certain wisdom, the courageous individual knows that the best he can do when faced with unavoidable evils is to make the least of them rather than to fight to overcome them in vain. Such wisdom gives rise to an impressive bearing in the face of adversity, a bearing that excites and deserves admiration.

If, however, the *Laches* and the *Republic* suggest that courage is a genuine virtue only to the extent that it is exercised as part of one's own truest good, the truth of this teaching is open to question. Investigating whether or not it is true would require us to address more fully than we have objections to this teaching, especially those voiced by individuals who might claim that it is ignoble, and perhaps even sinful, to be oriented primarily by one's own true good. The inability, however, of any of Socrates' interlocutors to maintain consistently that it is noble to forget the concern with what is truly good for a human being is a powerful, though by no means decisive, piece of evidence against such objections. Glaucon's inability to set aside such concerns is evident in his initial request that Socrates show that justice, understood as complete devotion to the good of others, is choiceworthy for the just man; Laches' similar inability is evident in his refusal wholeheartedly to endorse the view that courage is foolish steadfastness.

Insofar, then, as we have seen that Plato's treatment of courage points to a great difficulty with the ordinary view of courage, does his indication of the fundamental connection between genuine virtue and knowledge of one's true good resemble modern political theory by making the primacy of one's own good the foundation of political thought? It does not. Studying Plato's treatment of courage enables us to grasp the power and complexity of the deep concerns in the human soul that incline us to resist pursuing our own good and even to feel that

life can be truly fulfilling only when it is dedicated to a higher purpose than our own benefit. Plato's treatment of courage is able to plumb the depths of courage because it takes as its starting point what ordinary individuals think about it. As he reveals the tensions in ordinary accounts of courage, his treatment forces us to attempt to draft a coherent account of courage, which attempt compels us to confront the question of the true human good. If this treatment has something formal in common with liberalism's emphasis on the primacy of the individual good, it remains very different in substance.

If, however, in doing justice to the longings for heroic courage, Plato's treatment shows these longings to be complicated and in need of refinement, does his treatment then suggest agreement with those who dismiss those longings as unhealthy and dangerous? On the contrary, the connection between the capacity for dedication in those who revere courage and the need for such dedication in order to philosophize leads Plato to evaluate the admiration for heroic courage very differently. For Plato, that admiration testifies to the existence of a longing in the human soul not sufficiently addressed by the critics of courage: the longing for noble endeavor. If they correctly argue that attempts to satisfy that longing by exercising courage can be misguided, this does not mean that human health consists in suppressing or renouncing ambitions to transcend the ordinary world. To dismiss such ambitions is, at the very least, counterproductive because to dismiss them means to fail to educate them and thereby to leave them lurking within the soul, ready to flare up in unexpected ways. According to Plato, moreover, human health can result only from recognizing and thinking through the significance of transcendent ambitions so that one might arrive at a full account of the truth of the human situation. To downplay courage and similar phenomena is, he teaches, to deprive oneself of access to that truth.

As we have seen, Plato does not explore the foundations of ordinary courage to debunk it or to praise it as useful for mere self-preservation. It would be wrong, Plato's account suggests, to understand the importance of courage to the human soul in this light, for this would confuse narrow and material advantages with our true good. It is all too easy to be seduced and distracted by the pursuit of comfortable self-preservation, which the early modern and liberal theorists know involves many and great pleasures. But a life surfeited with them remains fundamentally dissatisfying, as even those who describe human life in this way acknowledge.[1] The admiration or even longing for noble courage testifies to our wish not just to be secure and well provided for but to flourish. Because it is far from evident how we can do this, the wish to flourish—at least if it is strong—when combined with uncertainty about how to do so awakens us to the need to

think about our own situation and the world around us. Following through on this realization can, according to Plato, lead to the philosophic life.

Now it is true that those who long for noble courage may not in any way think they care about philosophy. There is a certain kinship, though, between the partisans of noble courage and philosophers: both seek a non-utilitarian, uniquely human activity that transcends the plane on which most human beings live and through the practice of which they can thrive. The longings for heroic courage can perhaps find true satisfaction only in philosophy, because, at least according to Plato's arguments, philosophy is the activity that provides genuine, that is to say non-contradictory, satisfaction for the soul. It is philosophers, Plato's Socrates says in the *Republic,* who live on the "Isles of the Blessed," which is to say it is they who find real happiness. It is also the philosophers who Socrates says at the end of the *Republic* are the only ones who would, if they were able, choose the same life over again.

Whatever kinship exists between the partisans of noble courage and philosophers, it is obviously going too far to say that the former are likely to become the latter. As the example of Achilles shows in spades, the spiritedness underlying courage can lead to a self-righteous rage that blinds reason. The *Republic* as a whole, though, teaches that spiritedness can be educated, at least enough to become politically responsible. If Achilles reminds us that a raw spiritedness can cause human beings to seek single-mindedly what they believe they deserve in complete disregard of the common good, the education of the guardians of the city in speech suggests, by contrast, that spiritedness can also lead citizens to take pride in noble devotion to the city. The spirited respect for noble causes combined with the civic-minded and even noble portrait of philosophy can, moreover, lead spirited human beings, even if they cannot become philosophers, to honor them on grounds of kinship. For both political and philosophic interests, Plato's Socrates thus has good cause to look favorably upon spiritedness. In the *Republic* we see that he does not try to stamp out Glaucon's admiration for heroically courageous actions but rather to refine it and to lead Glaucon to admire philosophers.

As we have seen, however, it is not only true that spiritedness can make some human beings into supporters and allies of philosophers. Spiritedness also seems important at least for the initial stages of the ascent to philosophy. The life that takes seriously aspirations such as those implied in the admiration for noble courage takes happiness seriously. But it is one thing to take happiness seriously and another to pursue it seriously. Thoughtful but unwise human beings can come or be made to realize that they cannot give a coherent account of their deepest concerns. While this realization—if they do not shy away from it—cannot

help but make them feel dissatisfied with their lives, the *Republic*'s image of the cave teaches that it is very difficult and even painful to confront one's deepest concerns, at least for the overwhelming majority of human beings. For this reason, Plato suggests that a courageous nature may be particularly well suited for philosophy—and here I mean a nature that human beings in general would recognize as courageous.

Those with courage have a crucial support in at least the initial stages of the pursuit of wisdom—they are capable of devoting themselves to something noble, that is, to something whose advantage to themselves is unclear. One who possesses and cares about courage is not preoccupied with acquiring the material and mundane goods of life. Such an individual is, rather, inclined to admire and pursue things that cannot be readily justified by means of narrow calculation. Because of his longing for noble achievements, a courageous individual has the capacity to persist in philosophic endeavors despite the lack of clear connection to his happiness. Even if the life of the mind cannot ultimately be choiceworthy unless it is a happy one, a soul that is nobly courageous when it first embarks on this path can continue down it toward the happiness that Plato's Socrates promises lies in philosophy, even if that happiness is not unambiguously or altogether pleasant.

If one of the chief lessons of Plato's treatment of courage is the crucial place of the longing for noble courage in the economy of the human soul, however, this may seem of questionable relevance today. As we have seen, the focus of liberal political life on establishing security and material prosperity so as to enable human beings to pursue their individual versions of happiness has made noble courage sometimes seem an awkward and even suspect relic of the past. Examples of such courage persist, but, as Tocqueville noted (1969, 525), we tend to twist our understanding of those examples so that they conform to liberal theory. But even if such examples do persist, will they for long? As one of the most eloquent voices on behalf of courage has wondered, the accomplishments of our society are great, but "the accomplishments could very well have made it harder to help build in a child the kind of courage that made it all possible when the occasions for proving such courage are ever decreasing, when courage doesn't really seem necessary very often" (McCain and Salter 2004, 22). It is also the case that because, as we learn from Plato's *Republic,* one of the chief means of inculcating noble courage is honoring it, we will find it harder to nurture it to the extent that we are uncomfortable honoring it. How, then, we may reasonably wonder, can we preserve the health and vigor of noble courage?

The difficulty we face in preserving and encouraging the admiration and respect for noble courage is revealed in an especially enlightening way by John

Locke's treatment of courage in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* which accurately captures our contemporary attitude toward inculcating courage. In this treatise on how to educate the young, Locke defines courage and describes its goodness in a way that may seem to resemble what I have suggested is Plato's view. Locke describes "true fortitude" as "the quiet possession of a man's self" and as being "prepared for dangers of all kinds and unmoved whatsoever evil it be that threatens"; he ultimately summarizes courage as "noble and manly steadiness" (1996, 86–87 [II.B.§115]). But in order to cultivate this steadiness, Locke seeks to make children so prudent that they take on few risks. He focuses on preventing children from feeling frightened and then on habituating them gently to the things that frighten them, especially to pain (89 [II.B.§115]). He does not encourage the performance of noble deeds, and he strongly opposes organized military education. Moreover, he specifically warns against daring or the "insensibility of danger" (85 [II.B.§115]). He claims that running into danger is simply a sign of "ignorance or some more imperious passion," and he adds that nobody could be "so much an enemy to himself as to come within the reach of evil out of free choice" (86 [II.B.§115]).

In his effort to promote what might be called a hyperrational form of courage in the young, Locke encourages parents to teach their children not to think anyone would ever be foolish enough willingly to risk harm to himself. But this, together with Locke's objections to military education, means that the young will neither learn about nor experience activities that require them to forget about their own physical safety and well-being. They can surely acquire what looks like a form of courage if they are raised in accordance with Locke's prescriptions, for it is possible and even probable that, because their exposure to fearful things will be limited, they will be less fearful than others who are raised differently. One may well wonder, though, how well they would manage if they did encounter unfamiliar dangers. But this practical question is not the most important one to ask of Locke's education for courage, because in the liberal, peaceful world that he so successfully cultivated, human beings are less exposed to dangers than they were in pre-liberal political societies. The more important inquiry to press concerns the souls of those who acquire a "Lockean" courage: how likely is it that those who are taught to stay safely out of "the reach of evil" will learn to struggle in the face of adversity? If they come to think, as Locke says, that things "are good or evil . . . only in reference to pleasure or pain" (Locke 1975, 229 [II.xx.2]), for how long will they persist in painful inquiries when it seems much easier and more pleasant to dismiss their ignorance as trivial—for example, by affirming that seeking the truth is wasted effort because no one can know it anyway?

The sobriety that is a hallmark of liberal democracy, especially of advanced liberal democracy, makes it somewhat difficult to cultivate heroic courage today—or even a deep appreciation for it. Plato's analysis of courage, though, indicates that it would be worthwhile for us to do so because a properly educated courage is both politically salutary and (what is more important for Plato) important for the philosophic enterprise. Does Plato, however, have anything to teach us about how to cultivate courage? One must always be careful in attempting to draw prescriptions from Plato's dialogues, both because the thoughts expressed in them occur in contexts very different from ours and because it is Plato's characters, not Plato, who express these thoughts. Still, we can discern a few broad principles from his treatment of courage.

First, Plato counsels a much higher regard for spiritedness than is possessed by contemporary critics, especially feminist critics, of manliness. To be sure, Plato is very much alive to the potential dangers of spiritedness—indeed, he is second to none in his recognition of the capacity of spiritedness to fill human beings with a blinding, unreasonable sense of self-righteousness. Yet spiritedness also emerges from his dialogues as a rich raw material that can be trained into beautiful forms. Without spiritedness, there is no noble pride, no grand ambition, no toughness in the face of adversity. On the other hand, spiritedness alone does not suffice to bring these qualities into being; what is also needed is an education of spiritedness.

As we have seen, Plato's *Republic* outlines such an education. It aims to produce a tough-minded—and high-minded (here I refer to the education in beauty that the guardians are to receive)—self-reliance. It goes without saying that one should hardly seek to adopt that education lock, stock, and barrel; each of its features must be assessed in light of the aims of the education, and there is no place in liberal democracy for the *Republic*'s guardians. Indeed, whether any particular feature of the *Republic*'s education of spiritedness is worth implementing today in some form, requires careful thought about the sorts of human beings we want to form. Indeed, this is true for any discussion of education. But spiritedness ought to be educated in *some* way. One of the dangers to which liberal democracy, with its emphasis on peaceableness, is vulnerable is a certain disregard for spiritedness and therefore a failure to think seriously about educating it. As a consequence, spiritedness can take ugly forms, ranging from the mundane (such as a prickly vanity) to the murderous (violent rage over perceived slights).

Whatever particular forms the education of spiritedness should take today, perhaps the most important principle is a turn away from the spirit of the Lockean educational reforms just discussed. That is, the young should be led to encounter

adversity and encouraged to persist in the face of it, so that through regular experience of overcoming obstacles they learn to take a calm pride in their capacity for self-reliance.[2] This hardly requires a radical departure from the ways in which many parents raise their children today; organized sports, for example, gives children early experiences in perseverance. But how this sort of experience can educate spiritedness should be clearly grasped, at least because it informs what lessons deserve emphasis from the perspective of cultivating a healthy spiritedness. From this perspective, what matters in sports is less the development of skills or of the capacity for teamwork—valuable though these traits may be—than learning to rein in the excesses to which spiritedness is prone, such as exultation in victory and anger over unfair results.

At this stage I suspect that many, or even most, readers would agree that spiritedness deserves renewed attention today, on something like the ground that the pendulum has swung too far against spiritedness and needs to be pushed in the other direction. But rehabilitating spiritedness is not the same thing as rehabilitating heroic courage. What might—what should—be done to foster a renewed admiration for such courage, and even to foster the virtue itself?

Here we should recognize an obvious, and sensible, objection: praising such courage risks fanning the flames of fanaticism with which we have become all too familiar. As Plato teaches, the attraction to courage is intimately connected to—perhaps inseparable from—the longing for transcendence, and this longing can be dangerous, particularly in its connection to courage. Through that connection, the longing for transcendence can take monstrous forms; human beings can come to aspire so strongly to transcend their mortal selves through acts of (apparent) courage that they become blinded to other concerns. Or, rather, those other concerns become distorted, as the consciousness that one is supremely courageous leads to the belief that one is supremely in the right.

Reservations about a single-minded love of courage, however, show not that courage must be given a wide berth but merely that courage must not be loved single-mindedly. It must not be severed from the rest of virtue, particularly justice. We have seen powerful evidence of a natural admiration for the refusal to shrink before the prospect of death, no matter who is refusing to shrink and no matter what his reason is. But we have also seen that courage is admired because it is noble, and that human beings balk at attributing nobility to wicked acts. Developing this latter aspect of the admiration for courage is necessary to combat the potential excesses of that admiration. This means, however, much more than an insistence that courage must be exercised in the service of noble ends and is therefore no virtue if it is not accompanied by justice. For there is something

about courage—or, we should say, about what appears to be courage—that inspires awe in the abstract, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. A proper regard for courage cannot be developed without careful attention to the interplay between the admiration for sheer steadfastness, on the one hand, and for full nobility, on the other. One would also have to reflect on how courage may be good for the courageous man, since part of what we mean by virtue is that it is good for those who possess it.

In short, developing a genuine appreciation of and admiration for courage requires us to treat it as a puzzle. It is, of course, hardly a math puzzle; it cannot be understood apart from the human beings who embody it or who attempt to embody it. A crucial part of an education in courage, then—undoubtedly its first stage, particularly for the young—is studying examples of human beings renowned for their displays of courage. Initially appearing as role models to us, they later become touchstones for our understanding, as we seek to grasp precisely what is admirable in them. To put it briefly, cultivating the most genuine admiration for courage requires studying something like the combination of, on the one hand, John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* and John McCain's *Why Courage Matters* and, on the other hand Plato's *Laches* and *Republic*.

Whatever the extent to which courage can play a more prominent role in our lives, both public and private, it is a grave error to ignore the vital potential of the longings that are manifest in our admiration for heroic courage, because properly conceived and directed, they enable us to attain genuine human dignity. To discount admiration for traditional courage, for coming, as Locke says, "within the reach of evil out of free choice," is to undermine the strength that human beings generally need to acquire greater psychic health. As irrational or excessive as the old admiration for courage may have been, the teaching that I have aimed to articulate in this book contends that it is a great helpmate to the effort to acquire the wisdom that human beings recognize is essential to true happiness. From Plato's perspective, then, the cure proposed by contemporary critics of courage—vitiating or even eradicating the admiration for heroic courage, which, admittedly can be fraught with political danger—is worse than the disease.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION. THE PROBLEM OF COURAGE

1. See Doyle 1983; Owen 1997, 17–22; Orwin and Pangle 1982, 28–32.

2. Above and beyond, that is, even what justice demands. We expect and demand that people act justly; we honor those whose courage rises to heroic proportions.

3. Ringle 1997.

4. Giuliani 2001.

5. Bush 2001.

6. Senator John McCain argues that this kind of courage ought to be the standard for identifying an act as courageous (McCain and Salter 2004, 13–15).

7. This further shows how important courage is to us: the worst epithet that could be used against the terrorists was *coward*.

8. Sontag 2001, emphasis added.

9. Fish 2001. It is noteworthy that Fish does not quite accurately reproduce Sontag's statement. Whereas Sontag calls courage a "morally neutral *virtue*" (emphasis added), Fish describes it as a "quality." Did Fish mean to distance himself from Sontag's claim by replacing "virtue" with "quality"?

10. Marks 2002 (quoting Bill Maher).

11. Ibid.

12. For an argument that emphasizes the importance of risk and rashness to courage, see Miller 2000, 151–71.

13. All quotations from the *Ethics* are from Martin Ostwald's translation, modified where appropriate. The word translated here as "noble" is *kalon,* an important word in Greek philosophy and an important word for understanding courage. It has several meanings in addition to "noble," including "beautiful" and "fine." In the Platonic passages discussed in this book, "noble" is usually the most appropriate translation. For a brief but excellent summary of the range of meanings of *kalon* in Plato's dialogues, see Thomas L. Pangle's translator's note at Plato 1980, 512–13. Pangle calls particular attention to the way in which *kalon* overlaps with but is distinct from *agathon,* or "good": "the *kalon* is used to refer to those things which bring honor, which are splendid, difficult to obtain, requiring some sacrifice but also, good as ends in themselves. The 'good' (*agathon*) is used to refer to a much wider range of things, including . . . ugly necessities or things good only as means, and . . . good things whose attainment is not rare."

14. MacIntyre follows Aristotle in identifying the benefit to the courageous man himself as a crucial part of virtue (see especially 1984, 148–50). As we have seen above, however, this criterion is particularly difficult for courage to meet, and MacIntyre, unlike Aristotle, is either not alive to or else not troubled by the implication of this for the status of courage as a virtue.

15. It is Aristotle, of course, not Plato, who is MacIntyre's ancient inspiration. But a significant part of what he dismisses in Aristotle is what he takes Aristotle to have inherited from Plato, especially the notion of the unity of virtue (*AV* 163–64). For an excellent critique of MacIntyre's rejection of this Platonic/Aristotelian notion, see Tessitore 2003, 141–58.

16. Post–9/11, there has been renewed interest in courage among classicists. The edited collection by Rosen and Sluiter (2003) on courage in antiquity, for example, contains some illuminating studies, from a linguistic and cultural perspective, of the importance and use of manly courage (*andreia*) in classical Greek and Roman life. Also in the wake of 9/11, Senator John McCain has written a beautiful and deeply thoughtful meditation on courage and the men and women he thinks most perfectly exhibit it (McCain and Salter 2004).

17. Tierney 2001; Brown 2001.

18. Rather than being a central cause of this decline in esteem, it is, indeed, far from clear that the feminists under discussion here were widely read.

19. Critics argue, for example, that because military personnel—in war simulations as well as in actual combat—demean their enemies by labeling them "women" and speak of their military objective as "overwhelming and penetrating" the enemy, military culture creates a climate in which men, in speech and therefore in thought, degrade women in the same way they degrade the enemy (McBride 1995, 40, 55, 67–70; see also Held 1993, 144–48).

20. To the objection that the U.S. Marines were in Lebanon to serve the national interest rather than for "empty" honor, Brown could respond that a desire for honor distorted American leaders' understanding of the national interest.

21. The characterization of heroic courage as a primarily male phenomenon is not confined to its contemporary critics. The best translation of the Greek word *andreia,* which is normally translated simply as "courage," might well be "manliness" (insofar as the word refers to the virtue, rather than merely the characteristics, of a man), for the root of the word is *anêr,* or "man." This etymology implies that, at least according to the ancient Greeks, courage is above all the virtue of a man—that is, that the courageous individual is not merely an excellent human being: he is a manly or even "macho" man (cf. Salkever 1991, 167). For the most comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Hobbs (2000) as a whole, esp. 68–75, 96–98, 240–49.

22. For a similar account, see Arendt 1958, 19, 31, 36–37, 199; 1968, 151–56.

23. Feminists as diverse as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who says that "work previously undertaken out of economic necessity has become central to identity" (1995, 120; see also 113, 121), and Shulamith Firestone, who advocates freeing women "from the tyranny of their biology by any and every means necessary" (1971, 206), echo this sentiment.

24. This last statement became significant in retrospect, as King was assassinated the day after he uttered it.

25. Indeed, that this is a genuinely *human* admiration appears in the fact that many women are moved and inspired by, though perhaps less eager to demonstrate, acts of

heroic courage. Critics of heroic courage usually downplay the desire among some women to serve in the military. In spite of the encouragement they offer women to pursue careers formerly dominated by men, many feminists are dubious about the military, doubting in this one instance that women could truly be attracted to a career that has long held great appeal for men. Ruddick, for example, seems to try to explain away this attraction by suggesting that women seek military careers only because "for women confined in domestic life, war offers real education, new training and job experience" (1984, 257).

26. Brown thus resembles the other critics we have discussed, who trace courage to a desire to escape necessity.

27. Berkowitz 1999, xiv.

28. On this understanding of liberalism, see especially Rawls 1996, xli, 179.

29. Kant, for example, praises the courage to be guided only by one's own understanding (1985, 54). He does not, however, explore the precise character of this courage, for example whether it is similar to or different from the courage that men exhibit in their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their country.

30. Cultivating in citizens the willingness to risk their lives for the principles of the regime may make them more willing to risk their lives for other principles, such as religious ones, that liberalism prefers to treat as matters of private concern.

31. Hobbes 1994, 74–80, 100, 138, 219 (13.1–14.4, 15.40–41, 21.5, 30.1); Locke 1980, 8, 17, 46–48, 52, 65–66, 68 (§§ 3, 22, 87–89, 95, 123–24, 131).

32. Rahe very eloquently describes Locke's goal as drawing educated men away from "illusions of heroic grandeur . . . toward the cautious hedonism, the mild skepticism, and the genial tolerance typical of men engrossed in commerce, busy with the improvement of agriculture and the mechanical arts through the application of science, and too caught up in the pursuit of a future happiness in this world to be zealous for salvation in the world to come or passionately intent on immortal fame" (1992, 314–15).

33. See Locke 1996, 30–38, 75–90 (§§ 41–62, 103–17); Smith 1982, 237–46 (VI.iii.1–20); Franklin 1964, 148–50 (where Franklin includes "resolve" rather than courage in his list of virtues); Publius 1987, nos. 1, 3, 11. Cf. also the discussion at Shklar 1984, 4.

34. This example is chosen less lightly than may appear to be the case. We shall see in our analysis of Plato's *Laches* that Laches scoffs at attributing courage to the man who knows how to spend his money so as to increase it.

35. A notable exception to contemporary intellectuals' general neglect of courage is William Ian Miller's evocative and lively book, *The Mystery of Courage* (2000). Miller offers a thoughtful, personal meditation on different instances of courage, and he helpfully illuminates its many complexities and contradictions. But he devotes only a short chapter to Plato's extensive treatment on courage, focusing on a modern soldier's reaction to Plato's *Laches* rather than on the dialogue itself. As a result, Miller's thought-provoking treatment fails to plumb the full depths of courage in the way that a careful study of Plato's analysis makes possible.

36. There is a small dramatic connection between the dialogues: the famous general Nicias, one of the main interlocutors in the *Laches,* has a son, Niceratus, who is referred to in the *Laches* and who is present, though silent, during the conversation reported in the *Republic*.

37. Plato's *Protagoras* and *Laws* also have claims to be important for a study of courage because they both contain important passages on courage. I discuss these passages where appropriate, but because neither dialogue devotes the sustained attention to courage that we find in the *Laches* and *Republic,* they are not the focus of this book.

38. Strauss, however, argues that "a careful reading of the [*Laches*] would show that it answers the question [of what courage is] as least as well as the *Republic* answers the question of what justice is" (1964, 106).

39. For examples of this view see Cross and Woozley 1966; Guthrie 1975; Irwin 1977; Vlastos 1991, especially chapters 2 and 3. For a very helpful summary of the developments in Plato scholarship, see Gonzalez 1995, 5–13 and Griswold 1999, 361–66.

40. For the range of agreement on this view, see O'Brien 1967, 3–15; Arieti 1991, 1–17; Rutherford 1995, 23–29; Gill and McCabe 1996; Kahn 1996, xxiii–xvi; Cooper 1997, xii–xxv; McCabe 2000, 4–8; Griswold 2002.

41. Despite the consensus that Plato's dialogues must be read as dramas, serious disagreements over the interpretations of Plato's thought of course remain (see especially the variety of interpretations represented by Gill and McCabe 1996, Rutherford 1995, Kahn 1996 and the debate between Kahn and Griswold in Griswold 1999, Kahn 2000, and Griswold 2002).

42. For a helpful criticism of the use of Aristotle's distinction between Socratic and Platonic views to support the developmentalist approach, see Kahn 1996, 79–87.

43. For an especially instructive critique of one attempt to reject the traditional developmentalist approach by treating the dialogues as dramas that fails to abide by this principle consistently, see Griswold 2000. Griswold himself proposes a highly plausible version of "developmentalism," plausible in large part because it is compatible with treating the dialogues as dramas (Griswold 1999, 386–91). He suggests that there may be in the dialogues a "fictive chronology" of Socrates' life that can be established according to dramatic indications found in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* and *Parmenides* (2000, 195–97). Such a "fictive chronology" would be a reasonable interpretive guide, as it would provide compelling evidence that Plato meant his dialogues to convey something about Socrates' own intellectual history.

44. In practice, remnants of "developmentalism" persist even in the work of those who have rejected it. For example, Cooper recommends "relegating thoughts about chronology to the secondary position they deserve and [concentrating] on the literary and philosophical content of the works, taken on their own and relation to others" (1997, xiv). He then suggests a few pages later that the absence in Plato's *Gorgias* of any reference to the theory of Forms is a sign that in this dialogue "Plato intends not to depart, as he does elsewhere, from Socratic methods of reasoning or from the topics to which Socrates devoted his attention" (xvi; see also xv, xxiii). Cooper attributes the absence of "the Forms" in the *Gorgias* to a difference between Plato's "early," or Socratic, dialogues and his "later," or non-Socratic, dialogues. Insofar as Cooper's suggestion about the *Gorgias* fails to consider whether dramatic factors in the dialogue itself might explain either the absence of "the Forms" in the *Gorgias* or their presence in other dialogues, Cooper does not treat the dialogue sufficiently on its own terms.

45. For excellent discussions of this approach to Plato, see Strauss 1946, 345–52; Strauss 1964, 50–62; Rosen 1968, xi–xxxiv; Bloom 1991, preface; Craig 1994, prologue; Ahrensdorf 1995, 4–6; Griswold 2002, 143–67.

46. For an additional and very compelling explanation of Plato's use of the dialogue form, which treats dialectics as the sole method of refuting the greatest challengers to the possibility and worth of the philosophic enterprise, see Griswold 2002, 143–67.

CHAPTER 1. COURAGE AND THE EDUCATION IN VIRTUE

1. Contrary to the claims of Grote, who attributes the "double titles" of Plato's dialogues to Thrasylus (1875, I.160), Hoerber finds in ancient sources proof that these titles are much older than Thrasylus (d. A.D. 36) as well as some evidence that they may have been Plato's own. See Hoerber 1957, 15, 18–20.

2. Although it is impossible to deduce the precise dramatic date of the dialogue, we can tell that the action occurred roughly around the time that the so-called Peace of Nicias was concluded, in 421 B.C.E. The historical events that frame the dialogue are the battle of Delium (424 B.C.E.), where, as we learn in the dialogue, Laches and Socrates retreated together, and the battle of Mantinea (418 B.C.E.), in which Laches was killed. (Nicias' own death in Syracuse occurred in 413 B.C.E.) Schmid argues for 423 B.C.E., on the ground that if the dialogue occurred later, "it would be amazing even for Lysimachus not to have heard of Socrates, whose name Aristophanes that year made a household word in Athens" through his play, the *Clouds* (1992, 183n1). Cf. Hoerber 1968, 95–96; Taylor 1949, 58.

3. Although Laches had some success in Sicily, he also suffered some defeats. Within a year, the fleet to Sicily was doubled and Laches was replaced by one of the generals commanding the new fleet (Thucydides III.115).

4. I have used Burnet's Oxford edition of the text of the *Laches*. Translated passages, though, are drawn primarily from James Nichols 1987, modified where appropriate.

5. In the two infamous incidents where Patton upbraided and struck soldiers after discovering that they were being treated in field hospitals for nerves, Patton explained his actions as a product of his having been "overcome to the point of tears by the courage of the desperately wounded men he had initially encountered" (Showalter 2005, 315; see also D'Este 1995, 544–46). Patton apparently also set a high standard for his own courage, regularly testing his own nerves, and was hard on himself when he found himself wanting (D'Este 1995, 124, 469, 655).

6. For an extremely revealing account of Colin Powell's vision of warfare, see Gordon and Trainor 1995, especially 129–32, 468–69.

7. Among those who argue that the *Laches* offers no real account of courage are Taylor (1949, 58) and Friedlander (1964, 49). Croiset dismisses it as "une simple exposition de méthode" (1921, 88).

8. Bonitz suggests this definition, claiming that it salvages the correct elements in Laches' and Nicias' definitions (1886, 216). For similar arguments, see Grote 1875, I.480; O'Brien 1963, 147; Devereux 1977, 136; Griswold 1986, 189; and Dobbs 1986, 846. For a comprehensive list of scholarly opinions on the *Laches,* see O'Brien 1967, 117n8.

9. For the best treatment of this theme in the *Laches,* see Bruell 1999, 49–61.

10. Ancient Greek warfare emphasized the tight phalanx formation, which placed a premium on coordinate fighting in lines and columns. *Hoplomachia,* which is composed from the words *mache* (fight) and *hoplon* (the heavy shield used by the hoplite, or infantry

soldier), was the study of how to fight with heavy arms in hand-to-hand combat of the sort that might occur after the phalanx formation broke down in battle. See Adcock 1957, 3–14; Schmid 1992, 4; and Tatham 1938, 42. See also Plato, *Euthydemus* 271d, and Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III.1.

11. Because of his surpassing reputation for justice, Lysimachus' father Aristeides was given the honorific "the Just." Along with Pausanias, he commanded the combined Athenian and Spartan armies in their defeat of the Persians at Plataea. See Plutarch 1864, 391 and Plato, *Gorgias* 526b. Melesias' father Thucydides was a respected and very influential Athenian nobleman. According to Schmid, he was a prominent member of the Athenian conservative party, dubbed "the Few," and he opposed Pericles' building up of Athens (1992, 3). Cf. Plato, *Meno* 94a–d, where Socrates describes both men as exemplars of virtue.

12. For an excellent discussion of the connection between courage (*andreia*) and the traditional Greek conception of male virtue, see Hobbs 2000, 76–86.

13. See, for example, Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 155–56 and 189–90, where women disguised as men accidentally reveal their sex by swearing by Hera (Bonnette 1994, 158n116).

14. If I am not mistaken, Lysimachus is the only man other than Socrates in Plato's dialogues to use the feminine oath. For Socrates' use of this oath, see *Apology* 24e; *Theaetetus* 154d; *Phaedrus* 230b; *Gorgias* 449d; *Hippias Major* 287a, 291e.

15. Indeed, according to Alcibiades, Socrates' conduct at Delium was more impressive than that displayed by Laches. See Plato, *Symposium* 220e–21b. Cf. Plato, *Apology* 28e.

16. Cf. Plato, *Meno* 93e–94c, where Socrates contradicts Lysimachus' claims that his and Melesias' lack of noble deeds stems from their fathers' inattention to their education; *Protagoras* 319a–320a.

17. Lysimachus and Melesias have brought the generals to see this new kind of spear-fighting for the first time (178a3; cf. 183d1–3).

18. Anderson 1991, 26, 33–35; see also Hanson 1989, 165–68.

19. See Lazenby 1991, 100–101.

20. See the discussion of this point in Blitz 1975, 193, and Schmid 1992, 65–67.

21. Patton is a good example of a general who seems, unlike Nicias, to have held toughness and courage to be even more important than strategic knowledge or equipment. Patton repeatedly emphasized to his troops that their success depended far more on the men themselves than on their weapons: "Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of the men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory" (D'Este 1995, 607; see also 388, 414). Patton held himself to the same standard, claiming that he would "never ask any man to undergo risks which I, myself, do not incur" (ibid., 388). For instances of generals in ancient cities standing and dying with their armies, see Hanson 1989, 113–15.

22. Hobbs suggests that Nicias here reveals himself to be concerned with "the traditional ideal of the male warrior" (2000, 81). While I also agree with Hobbs's emphasis on the importance to Nicias of technical skill, I think his interest in skill is less because he wants to be a paragon of male virtue than because he fears that he lacks courage.

23. Cf. 188d. Laches' claim that the Dorian (Spartan) is the sole Greek *harmonia* underscores how much he admires the Spartans. The courage Laches admires is the kind of

Spartan courage to which Thucydides refers when he describes how at the battle of Mantinea the Spartans, utterly outdone in skill, showed themselves superior in courage (V.72.3). This is the battle in which Laches was killed. For a detailed discussion of the battle, see Kagan 1981, 124–37.

24. These considerations may explain Blitz's argument that Laches' objection to *hoplomachia* reveals his "horizon . . . to be the public, the common good, what is useful for the city" (1975, 195). I disagree, however, that this accurately captures Laches' horizon. Although Laches is clearly impressed with the Spartans' devotion to war, he does not praise their skill in war because it benefits the city. Indeed, as we will see, Laches excoriates *hoplomachia* because it undermines men's ability to prove their own virtue (184b–c). Cf. Dobbs 1986, 832. For an interpretation closer to my own, see Schmid 1992, 69.

25. Herodotus VII.206–28. That Laches' high opinion of Sparta rests on her nobility in precisely such cases as Thermopylae is suggested by his first definition of courage as "remaining in the ranks" and not fleeing (190e4–7).

26. Plato 1938, 55; Plato 1985, 12; Anderson 1991, 24.

27. Plato 1938, 55; Anderson 1991, 24.

28. According to Schmid, Socrates probably relies on Melesias to make this point because Melesias is of aristocratic stock and hence less likely to respect majority opinion (1992, 73–74).

29. For a masterful analysis of this passage, see Bruell 1999, 55–57.

30. Note that Socrates does not deny that the sophists possess this art.

31. O'Brien provides a useful starting point for analysis by observing that Laches is a man of deeds and Nicias a man of speeches or arguments; from this he argues that their respective deficiencies with respect to courage indicate that genuine courage will be manifest in both deeds and speeches (1963, 136, 146–47). Cf. Hoerber 1968, 99.

CHAPTER 2. NOBLE COURAGE

1. To be fair to Laches, he may not suspect that *he* rather than "we" will have to explain virtue or, rather, courage; he may think that Socrates will collaborate with him.

2. This is only the second oath in the dialogue, Lysimachus' oath "by Hera" being the first.

3. Patton reflected a similar view when he said in a 1941 speech preparing soldiers for war, "Battle is not a terrifying ordeal to be endured. It is a magnificent experience wherein all the elements that have made man superior to the beasts are present: courage, self-sacrifice, loyalty, help to others, devotion to duty" (D'Este 1995, 402).

4. For examples of such conduct, see Herodotus VII.220–28; Thucydides 5.10.9; Xenophon 4.8.38–9.

5. For examples of such retreats, see Thucydides 3.108, 4.44, 4.76, 6.70; Plato, *Symposium* 221a–b.

6. This view of the goodness of courage is not peculiar to Laches. Indeed, it may be that most people who admire courage admire it as somehow good in itself. While both the more sophisticated Callicles in the *Gorgias* and Protagoras in the *Protagoras* praise courage in some instances as good in the sense of being advantageous for the courageous man—

that is, enabling him to accomplish something well—they too seem to hold something close to Laches' opinion. Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 491b, 491c–d with 497e, 499b–c; Plato, *Protagoras* 359e with 349d–e.

7. As James Nichols (1987, 255n27) observes, Socrates skews the meaning of Homer's text to support his claim that flight is a noble battle strategy. Socrates' interpretation of the term "counselor of flight" as one who advises his friends to flee is by no means the most plausible one. Homer seems rather to be describing the terror that Aeneas and his horses inspire in his enemies (see *Iliad* V.272, VIII.107). For a somewhat different interpretation of Socrates' reference to these Homeric passages, see Schmid 1992, 103.

8. Herodotus calls Plataea, where the Greeks put an end to the Persian threats of invasion under which they had long labored, "the fairest victory of any we have known" (IX.64). He explicitly praises the Persians' courage (IX.62).

9. Socrates might have used the word *anastrepho,* for example, which he uses to describe a calm retreat at 191e2, or other words, such as *apochero* (cf. Thucydides II. 89, 94, III. 13), that seem more consistent with his interpretation of the events than *pheugo* does.

10. Several editors of Greek editions of Plato note that Socrates' account of the battle differs from the accounts of Herodotus and Plutarch. See, for example, Plato 1938, 73, and Plato 1985, 25.

11. For these accounts of the battle, see Herodotus IX.51–65 and Plutarch 1864 ("Life of Aristeides"), 401–5.

12. This is not to say that such tactics were never used, even by the Spartans. See Herodotus VII.211.

13. Cf. Tessitore 1992, 126; Arieti 1991, 58. Laches would perhaps not have been so uncomfortable with the direction Socrates is taking if he had understood Socrates to be talking about a retreat, which required, as Laches himself earlier noted when praising Socrates for his brave retreat at Delium (181b1–4), great courage. Yet, as we will see, Laches may not be as entirely comfortable with retreats as his praise for Socrates' conduct suggests.

14. The notion of retreat is problematic for any soldier who admires courage (see D'Este 1995, 226, 434). Indeed, the presumption that tough soldiers will not retreat led one general of our time to misread his enemy and commit a strategic error. Towards the end of Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Norman Schwarzkopf was so firmly convinced that the battle-hardened Iraqis would never retreat that he missed strong indications from an early battle that they would (see the discussion of the battle of Khafji in Gordon and Trainor 1995, 286–88). Because of his blindness to this possibility, Schwarzkopf failed to revise his strategy so as to prepare for the possibility of an Iraqi collapse and flight. In the end, the Iraqis had plenty of time to escape and more than half of the Republican Guard divisions survived the war, a shocking failure in light of the Army's mission not merely to rout or render them ineffective but destroy them (ibid., 429–32).

15. For a vivid example of such considerations, see young John Talbot's speech in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 1,* at IV.v.25–30.

16. It was not only the Persians who took the Spartan action to be a cowardly flight. As Herodotus (IX.53–55) and Plutarch (1864, 403) report, Amompharetus, a Spartan soldier, refused to retreat with the rest of the Spartans because he believed that to do so would disgrace Sparta. In fact, Herodotus fails to include Pausanias, the Spartan general who called

for the retreat, in a list of the bravest Spartans at Plataea (IX.71). (For a different assessment of Pausanias' strategy, see Adcock 1957, 12.) The view of the Spartan conduct as shameful is not confined to antiquity. Because he himself seems to see the Spartan flight at Plataea as shameful, Schmid denies that Socrates means to identify it as a counterexample to Laches' initial definition of courage; Schmid is thus forced into making the awkward claim that Socrates uses this example not to question Laches' definition but to undermine his own suggestion that one can fight while fleeing and to offer quiet support to Laches' original definition (1992, 105).

17. For a particularly powerful account of this belief, see Gray 1959, 116, 125.

18. Socrates seems to emphasize the necessity of knowledge for warfare by suggesting that even Aeneas' horses had some knowledge (191b).

19. According to the Israeli commando Jonathan Netanyahu, the principle underlying paratroopers' training is "practice, practice, practice, until the fear that is present in the initial exercises disappears, and you discover there's not much to it" (1980, 62). Laches, as we will see, would deny that these paratroopers display as much courage as those who jump despite the fact that they are full of fear.

20. Socrates' list has occasioned much debate in the literature over whether or not he means, by citing all these various kinds of courage, to broaden the notion of courage so as to equate courage with the whole of virtue. Santas argues that he does (1980, 186–88); Schmid argues that he does not (1992, 107–8).

21. For an example of one sense in which bravery in battle and bravery in the face of pleasures could be understood to be similar, see *Protagoras* 352b–c.

22. *Karteria* can mean endurance or steadfastness; see also *Symposium* 219d6. It derives from the word *karteros,* which means strength or sturdiness.

23. See *Protagoras* 351b, especially the immediate transition.

24. Many commentators have concluded from this passage that both Socrates and Laches think that courage is "among the noblest things." This goes too far, since all we learn here is Laches' view. See Hobbs 2000, 89; Santas 1980, 188; and Devereux 1977, 133.

25. The sophist Protagoras shares an admiration for steadfastness in itself. This admiration partly explains how he can think at the same time that a person can be both courageous and ignorant and that courage is something noble (cf. *Protagoras* 349d, 351b with 350b, 359e).

26. Cf. *Protagoras* 349e8–350a5, where Socrates uses the same example of divers in order to clarify Protagoras' understanding of courage. When Socrates asks Protagoras whether those who dive into wells do so because they have expertise or whether they do so for some other reason, Protagoras says emphatically that it is the former (350a). Although he concedes that it takes daring, Protagoras goes on to deny courage to one who would dive into a well without the requisite expertise, calling such an act base or shameful. He appears to call it shameful because it would be to put oneself in unnecessary danger (350b5–6). If we consider Protagoras' commonsense response to the example of divers, we see that in the *Laches,* Socrates stacks the deck by asking Laches to *compare* the courage of expert divers with that of non-experts. Laches would not likely single out a non-expert diver as courageous, but when comparing the expert and non-expert diver, he cannot help being impressed by the greater guts of the non-expert. But forcing Laches into making this

comparison has the advantage of honing in on a crucial component of courage for Laches: courage means putting oneself at risk. Still, Laches concedes that the non-expert diver is steadfast "more foolishly." Moreover, he is "more foolish" not merely because he does something risky, but also because he does something risky—diving into wells—that serves no good purpose; no one lacking the expertise in cleaning wells would have any useful reason to dive into them. Unlike the steadfast soldier, the non-expert diver risks his life frivolously. This explains why Laches is more than merely uncomfortable with attributing the full virtue to ignorant diver; he is downright exasperated at the thought of having to do so.

27. Socrates' rhetorical machinations are evident here. First, by speaking of foolish *daring* as well as foolish steadfastness, he magnifies the recklessness of such steadfastness. Moreover, he now speaks of this steadfastness as *shameful* and harmful rather than wicked and harmful. The substitution of "shameful" for "wicked" seems designed to intensify Laches' dissatisfaction with his present claim, since while Laches might be tempted to think that something wicked can be noble, he is unlikely to think the same of something shameful. Thus, Socrates makes Laches' earlier agreement that foolish steadfastness is ignoble seem to be much stronger than it in fact was.

28. Schmid criticizes Laches in these exchanges for conceiving of prudence "in a merely technical sense" and ignoring the role of prudence in more broadly defining the ends of action, such as the general's prudence in knowing that one should do whatever is necessary to achieve victory in war (1992, 123; see also Vlastos 1994, 109–17). Laches is led to elevate the notion of foolish steadfastness, Schmid argues, only because he has defined prudence as what will keep a man safer. The difficulty with Schmid's claim is that it does not take into account that, or why, *Socrates* chooses examples of prudence that imply it is knowledge of how to accomplish one's task while advancing or safeguarding one's own good. It is true that Laches fails to correct him. But by characterizing prudence in this way, Socrates highlights Laches' attraction to the riskiness of noble courage. In choosing the examples of prudent steadfastness that he does, Socrates is doing precisely what Schmid denies he does (119): uncovering a tension in Laches' earlier agreement that "steadfastness accompanied by prudence is noble and good."

Hobbs has a very enlightening discussion of this tension between the noble and the good (2000, 89–91). But she, like Schmid, insufficiently apprehends that Socrates explicitly distinguishes himself from Laches' opinions (see 192c4, d7, d10) and that he chooses to present Laches with examples of prudence whose meaning is emphatically one's own benefit. Both of these facts suggest that Socrates is trying to coax out of Laches a *peculiar* tension between the noble and the good: insofar as the good means in some way good for oneself, the good is in conflict with the noble whose essence is risk to oneself. That Socrates reveals Laches to hold this opinion of the noble, however, does not mean that it is idiosyncratic (see *Alcibiades I* 115a–c; Aristotle, *NE* 1117b8–14 and *Rhetoric* 1389a3–b13).

29. I thus disagree that Laches' quandary is due merely to "thoughtlessness" (Devereux 1977, 134), to "cowardice" (O'Brien 1963, 141–42), or to the fact that "he has not reflected on the role of intelligence . . . in virtue" (Tessitore 1994, 119–20). Whereas these comments imply that Laches' position is rooted in a misunderstanding, I argue that it is rooted in a deep, if unarticulated, understanding. Because Laches partly believes that

courage is noble and that nobility means indifference to one's own good, he simply denies that courage is noble to the extent that it bolsters or furthers one's own good.

30. Thus, while not relinquishing his opinion that risk is the essence of courage, Laches turns out to share Protagoras' apparent opinion (at least as stated in *Protagoras* 350a–351b) that the nobility of courage is determined by the reason for the daring rather than by the daring itself. For his part, while Protagoras does not relinquish his opinion that the nobility of courage depends on wisdom about the proper end and on that end's being advantageous to the courageous individual (*Protagoras* 360a–b1), he seems to share Laches' opinion that the nobility of courage depends on confronting risks (see especially *Protagoras* 351e1–5).

31. Both Santas and Dobbs note that, by appealing to the existence of a "higher" or moral prudence that identifies as courageous those actions that are exercised for the sake of something *worthy* of one's life, Laches could have extricated himself from his contradictory position (Santas 1980, 192; Dobbs 1992, 838n8). Dobbs further argues that Socrates fails to make such an appeal for educative purposes; he means to provide Laches with "an opportunity to act courageously" by struggling to overcome his perplexity (1986, 838). Hobbs suggests that articulating the importance to courage of having moral knowledge of the proper ends would explain the importance to courage of having technical skills, as these are needed for accomplishing the moral end (2000, 94–95). These arguments all assume that appealing to a moral prudence would solve Laches' perplexity. I argue that it does not.

32. Some commentators (Blitz 1975, 211, 215; Mary Nichols 1987, 274; Schmid 1992, 101, 124–25; Tessitore 1994, 127–28) argue that Laches represents civic courage, that is, the courage that takes its bearings above all by what will ensure the city's victory or well-being. But this argument is undermined by Laches' failure to point to the courage of men at Plataea or Thermopylae or other battles as examples of prudent steadfastness that might qualify as noble courage. Laches' view of courage is rooted less in what is good for the city than in what constitutes the most noble posture of the courageous person's own soul.

33. See *Laws* 625e, 628d–e, where the Athenian Stranger, in only a few exchanges, leads the old Cretan, Kleinias, from insisting that war is the end of all the divine Cretan laws to conceding that any lawgiver worthy of the name legislates the things of war for the sake of peace and not the other way around. Cf. the Athenian Stranger's even more emphatic statement on the matter at *Laws* 803c–4b.

34. In his *Wasps,* Aristophanes confirms Laches' essential decency, depicting him as a loyal, if somewhat dull-witted, old dog who has served his city well. Laches' essential decency is crucial to his role in the dialogue. It would perhaps be harder to bring out the tension that appears in Laches with as much clarity in a fierce, battle-hungry warrior, such as Lamachus, who is portrayed as such by Aristophanes in his *Archanians* and who is paired with Laches by Nicias as men to whom he would not deny courage (197c; on Lamachus' bold strategic proposal for Sicily, see Thucydides VI.49–50 and the discussion in Orwin 1994, 119; cf. Schmid 1992, 15).

35. A sign of Laches' frustration and of the direction in which he seems inclined to look for the solution may be the frequency with which he makes oaths to the gods; he swears

more frequently than anyone else in the dialogue. Laches' oaths may also suggest that he has a certain, perhaps hidden, hope that the gods can resolve his dilemma, that they can make steadfastness accompanied by prudence both noble and good, as he initially wants (192c8–9). Laches swears by Zeus when he tells Socrates that, having called courage both prudent and foolish steadfastness, they have not spoken nobly (193d10); his oath may be a not fully conscious appeal to the gods to harmonize the noble and the good and to make it possible for courage both to be an amazing capacity to face the greatest dangers and something that can constitute the greatest good for a human being.

CHAPTER 3. COURAGE AND WISDOM

1. The Greek word translated as "terrible" is *deinon*. Although "terrible" in colloquial English means "bad," its literal meaning in English, namely, terrifying, is the sense intended by the Greek word. Cf. James Nichols 1987, 250n17.

2. See especially Santas 1980, 195n10, 202. Devereux agrees but suggests that difficulties revealed in the definition provide evidence that Plato is distancing himself from Socrates (1977, 136–41). As my own account shows, I disagree with Devereux's premise that Nicias is Socrates' mouthpiece and thus also with his conclusion that the refutation of Nicias' definition evinces Plato's break with Socrates. First, and very simply, it is Socrates who challenges Nicias; if the Socrates of the *Laches* has different views from the Socrates of the *Protagoras,* this shows only that Socrates' thoughts may have changed over time, not that Plato broke with Socrates. It is also important to note that the definition at which Socrates arrives in the *Protagoras* is based on a number of premises which are adopted because Protagoras, who is asked whether such premises are correct, agrees that they are. For example, their conclusion that courage is knowledge of the correct choice between pleasure and pain (357a–b) is based on Protagoras' agreement that everyone aims only at pleasure (354b–c, 358b; but cf. 358b5 with 358c5, c7, and d5, which suggests that not everyone present agrees with this premise) and that the pleasant is identical to the good (351e, 356c, 357b–c). Therefore, the peculiar meaning of Socrates' definition of courage as wisdom here may reveal as much, if not more, about Protagoras than about Socrates' own view. That said, Socrates could hold some version of this definition to be true.

3. The significance of Plato's use of these different words is unclear. Aristotle attributes different meanings to them: *epistêmê* seems to describe a scientific knowledge of principles according to which the same outcome always occurs, whereas *sophia* seems to refer to a broader, more comprehensive understanding (see *NE* 1139b15–35, 1140b30–1141a20). Whatever Aristotle may mean by these terms, the extent to which they indicate a difference in the views of courage held by Socrates and Nicias can only be discerned by first teasing out, as Socrates proceeds to do, what precisely Nicias means by "the knowledge of terrible and emboldening things" and in what way such knowledge makes the courageous man good.

4. While Thucydides never calls Nicias a coward, he does describe him as "somewhat overaddicted to divination and practices of that kind" (VII.50). Plutarch suggests that Nicias "dreaded the divine powers extremely" (1864, 629) and calls him "cowardly" and "superstitious" (628, 639, 645).

5. For a very vivid account of the importance of pure "guts" to our ordinary understanding of courage, see Miller 2000, 8–10, 151–62, 192–96.

6. Even if knowledge required an auxiliary like steadfastness of soul, however, steadfastness of soul may not be accurately described as a virtue, at least in the ordinary sense of the word. Since steadfastness or toughness of soul is by itself aimless and its goodness thus ambiguous, it seems closer to a virtue of the body, like strength, health, or beauty, than to a virtue of the soul, like justice, moderation, or wisdom. For Plato's indications that place this aspect of courage more in the former than the latter group, see *Republic* 518d–e, *Laws* 963e.

7. Hobbs offers a somewhat different interpretation of Nicias' definition. She suggests that we can make sense of Nicias' strange claim if we understand him to be oriented primarily by what is noble and thus prepared to do the noble thing, even when it means choosing apparently great evils, like death (2000, 100–102). While Hobbs offers a plausible and powerful description of a certain understanding of courage, I doubt that it describes that held by Nicias, since Nicias neither mentions the noble when defending his definition of courage nor, as I will show in what follows, gives any indication in the course of the rest of his defense that this is his first principle of action.

8. One could say, as Socrates does at *Republic* 406d–e and 408a–b, that in some cases, for example where a man is extremely ill, it may no longer be profitable for him to live; such a man may simply no longer reap any benefits from life. But this statement differs from Nicias' statement, which says that one can actually profit from death. The strangeness of Nicias' use of "profitable" here is not, moreover, merely a problem with our translation. The word translated as "profitable" is used frequently by Socrates in a way that entirely conforms to our ordinary understanding of profitable as producing a positive good rather than as warding off a greater evil or resigning oneself to a lesser one. For such uses, see *Republic* 444d–e, 591a–b; *Theaetetus* 181b; *Statesman* 294e; *Alcibiades* 113d; *Gorgias* 478c.

9. This picture is bolstered by both Plutarch's and Thucydides' accounts of Nicias. Plutarch attributes the failed Sicilian expedition in large part to Nicias' excessive caution, arguing that "his reflection, his deliberateness, and his caution, let slip the time for action" (1864, 638–40). Thucydides' portrait reveals a Nicias whose fear of misfortune makes him not only extremely cautious in practical and political matters (V.17) but also scrupulous in fulfilling his duties towards the gods. Nicias' final speech in Thucydides' work indicates that he believes that his great virtue, particularly his piety, will save him from misfortune (VII.77; see also V.17 and Orwin 1994, 136–39).

10. The exact nature of the "life afterward" or "future" to which this phrase refers is ambiguous. Blitz (1975, 203 and especially 219) and Schmid (1992, 194) take it to refer to an afterlife. James Nichols (1987, 251) translates the phrase so as to leave open the possibility of this interpretation. W. R. M. Lamb in the Loeb edition translates this phrase as "the rest of his life," thereby excluding this possibility. Socrates' uses of this phrase fail to settle the issue, since they point in both directions. At *Phaedo* 90e, Socrates is clearly speaking about "the rest of one's life"; at *Republic* 619a–b and *Gorgias* 527e, however, Socrates undoubtedly refers to a future life, that is, a life that one has after death.

11. Pindar, too, depicts an afterlife in which gods reward or punish mortals according to their virtue and justice. He describes a "judge below the earth" who rules on "crimes

committed in this realm of Zeus" and says that "in the presence of the honored gods, those who gladly kept their oaths enjoy a life without tears, while the others undergo a toil that is unbearable to look at" (*Olympian* II.55–67; see also *Nemean* I.65–72). On the basis of just such tales, scholarly opinion seems to agree that the notion of unique rewards and punishments after death had a strong foundation in Greek tradition. Scholars focus especially on the role of the *chthonioi,* the earth-bound as opposed to Olympian gods (Guthrie 1951, 216–19, 254–59; Rohde 1966, 156–62, 217–18; Burkert 1985, 197–99). It is suggested that by the fifth century, the Homeric tales about the Olympian gods and these older *chthonioi* tales had become intertwined in such a way that together they provided the basis for a more complex notion of the afterlife, that is, one in which, depending on his actions in life, a man could have either eternal happiness or suffer eternal punishment in death, than is the dominant thrust of Homer's portrait. For example, Homer's "Elysium," that is, the place to which Menelaus was sent when he was spared death, became, for the worshippers of the Eleusinian mysteries, the place of eternal bliss to which initiates went after death (Guthrie 1951, 281, 290–91; Mylonas 1961, 226).

The most explicit promise of rewards and punishments after death came from the religious cult that worshipped the Eleusinian mysteries, which was very prominent in fifth-century Athens. According to Rohde, "large numbers not from Athens alone but from the whole of Greece sought eagerly to enter the state of grace vouchsafed to the worshippers at Eleusis" (1966, 225–29). The mysteries appear to have quite explicitly promised that its initiates would be rewarded with a blissful afterlife in which they would be delivered from all pains. See the Homeric hymn "To Demeter" 480ff.; Mylonas 1961, 238, 261, 266, 281–83. In Aristophanes' *Frogs,* Heracles tells Dionysus that on the way to Hades, one passes the unjust "stuck in a great sea of mud" because, among other things, they have injured a guest or host, molested a child, beaten up their parents, or broken an oath. Heracles goes on to note that on this path, one also passes those initiated into the mysteries, who, by contrast, live "in sunlight" and are surrounded by the "sweet sound of flutes" (145–65).

12. Greeks typically believed that any occurrence that was not entirely a matter of course, such as a sudden sneeze or an eclipse, was a sign through which the gods meant to indicate their will. Diviners or seers would interpret these apparent signs as indicating how the gods wanted human beings to act (Cicero 1997, 2.5). Herodotus describes how the Greeks and Persians at Plataea remained encamped opposite each other for ten days because the omens obtained by each side were unfavorable for an attack (IX.36). For a scholarly treatment of divination, see Burkert 1985, 111–13.

13. To say that we are not at the mercy of external forces is not to say that we do not require their assistance; we may be able to affect the degree to which they will help us.

14. My account of Nicias' statements here resembles Schmid's. He, however, maintains that if the knowledge Nicias speaks about is indeed knowledge of one's *own* good, Nicias' claims must be "sophistic" rather than "Socratic" and therefore incorrect (1992, 142–43). My argument identifies a different problem in Nicias' view of courage. Moreover, the argument that courage is good for *oneself* does not *ipso facto* mean that it is un-Socratic (see 190b–c; *Protagoras* 358d, *Republic* 336d–e, 435a–b; *Laws* 662d–e).

15. Socrates' reference to nature here is the second of two such references in the dialogue. The first is Laches' claim that if one were to say what courage is by nature in all

cases, one would have to say it is a certain steadfastness of soul (192b9–c1). Both references to nature suggest that there must be some natural foundation for courage, though that natural foundation is not itself the virtue. Hobbs suggests that in this line of questioning, Socrates elaborates a gender-neutral definition of courage (105); if animals have courage, then courage cannot be understood as "manliness." I would add that by separating the animal from the human version of courage, Socrates is also encouraging us to consider what is at stake in our human understanding of courage as something specifically *human,* that is, more like justice than like strength or toughness.

16. On this point, compare Laches' definitions of courage at 191a1–3 and 192b9 with *Protagoras* 349e–50c and *Republic* 503c–d.

17. Cf. 192e1–193b2, where Socrates, in his exchange with Laches, attaches a similar meaning to *prudent*.

18. Just as Nicias' aversion to uncertainty influences his account of courage here, it seems also to have influenced his military policy. Nicias was a famously prudent and cautious general. He successfully persuaded the Athenians to make peace with Sparta in 422 B.C.E. and tried desperately to dissuade the Athenians from the infamous Sicilian expedition. Thucydides attributes Nicias' support of the peace to the fact that only a peace treaty would allow him "to keep out of danger and commit himself as little as possible to fortune so as to preserve his good fortune and good name" (V.16.1). Nicias' opposition to the Sicilian expedition may have been motivated by similar concerns, though it also seems to have been an eminently sensible position (see especially Thucydides' judgment at II.65.11–12). However, the correctness of his subsequent recommendation of a fleet of unprecedented proportions seems less defensible (VI.24–26, 30–32). Although he deemed a large force essential to the expedition's safety, sending it to Sicily made the Athenians' defeat there catastrophic.

There is a striking similarity between Nicias' military policy and the principles underlying the reigning U.S. doctrine of overwhelming force that has been associated with General Colin Powell. Powell's doctrine establishes strict criteria for undertaking any military action: the military must be able to inflict a quick and decisive defeat, suffer minimal casualties, and promptly withdraw troops. By seeking to limit military action to cases where victory is guaranteed, the doctrine can paradoxically undermine victory. For instance, Gordon and Trainor point out that Powell's strict criteria for the use of military force led him to argue (successfully) against using U.S. warships to move into the Persian Gulf in the weeks before Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. While the warships would have lacked air and other support and thus been exposed, their presence could have constituted a sufficient show of force to deter Saddam Hussein from the invasion (1995, 29–30). More generally, however, Gordon and Trainor suggest that insofar as not all battles can be waged as decisively as the Powell doctrine requires, the armed forces are left strategically and psychically unable to deal adequately with other scenarios (ibid., 468–69; see also their remarkable account of a meeting between Powell and a top British military official at 130–31, 145).

19. Laches says that he will not speak his mind in response to Nicias, lest he be accused of being "Aixonean" (197c). The scholiast, James Nichols reports (1987, 263n36), says that "Aixonean" was a comic synonym for "abusive in speech."

20. Schmid gives a detailed and highly compelling account of the problems with Nicias' definition. Schmid concludes that Nicias' confusion stems primarily from an attempt on his part to reproduce the arguments of sophists such as Damon and Prodicus, that is, that Nicias is parroting what he has heard the sophists say and that Nicias' statements about courage therefore do not reflect his true opinions (1992, 174–75). It is true that Socrates names the sophists as the source of Nicias' views (197d), but this must be understood keeping in mind, first, that Nicias initially claimed to be repeating what he had heard *Socrates* say (194d) and, second, that in attributing Nicias' definition to the sophists Socrates also praises the sophists very highly. In fact, it is likely that since Laches has taken great umbrage at Nicias' definition, Socrates means to absolve himself of responsibility for Nicias' view by explicitly attributing it to the sophists, even as he tries to moderate Laches' anger towards the sophists, to whom Socrates is closer in an important sense than he is to Laches. Even, however, if Nicias has heard from the sophists something similar to what he has heard Socrates say, the definition he ultimately gives (195a1), as we have said, seems to be his own and the tensions in his account of courage, as I will show in what follows, reflect confusions about courage in his own soul.

21. That we might fear uncertain factors that accompany a certain evil, such as the extent of pain that might be involved, does not mean that we fear the certain evil.

22. Here I speak of the prisoner's attitude toward the fact of his execution; he might well fear the pain he will experience during his execution or his fate in the afterlife, insofar as he does not know what these might be. But then it is these things that he fears rather than his execution.

23. Socrates' refutation of Nicias has occasioned a great deal of debate among scholars about its connection to the Socratic claim that virtue is knowledge. One camp, led by Vlastos, maintains that although knowledge is required for the virtues, each virtue is different because it involves a different kind of knowledge; Socrates must therefore understand courage as a part of virtue. Vlastos maintains that Socrates in the *Laches* never refutes the position that courage is a part of virtue and that Socrates knows he has not done so, since he attributes to Nicias rather than embraces himself the inference that courage is the knowledge of all goods and evils (1981, 267–68; cf. Santas 1980, 202–5, and Devereux 1977, 138–40). On the other side of the debate is Penner, who maintains that the virtues are equivalent to knowledge of good of evil and thus that courage is identical to moderation, justice, and piety, since all involve the same knowledge (1973, 60–63). My argument is closer to Penner's than to Vlastos's, since I agree with Penner that none of the inferences Socrates draws in his final exchange with Nicias is necessarily mistaken. But although I also agree with Penner that the dialogue points the reader to a deeper understanding of Socrates' view (cf. Schmid 1992, 159–60, which denies that any solid conclusions about Socrates' views can be deduced from this dialogue), I do not think that Penner takes into sufficient account what is wrong with the conclusion about courage that Socrates elicits from Nicias insofar as that conclusion, as understood by Nicias (cf. 198b1 and 199a9 with 199e4), incorporates the extreme view of knowledge that we have discovered Nicias holds.

24. For more on the art of divination, see Burkert 1985, 111–14.

25. According to Burkert, whether the credit for a victory was due more to the commanding general or to the diviner was often a matter of dispute (1985, 113).

26. For an illustration of the difficulties involved in relying on oracles and the prophesies they issue, see Thucydides II.17 and 54, and Herodotus IX.42–43.

27. Although it is not fully appropriate to use Nicias' later actions at Sicily as a sign of what Socrates thinks of him at this time, we cannot forget what every Greek reader of this dialogue knew: that Nicias subordinated sound military policy and the advice of his fellow general Demosthenes to what he interpreted as the omen of a lunar eclipse.

28. While my understanding of Nicias' character has much in common with Dobbs's account of Nicias' wish to eliminate "the riskiness in human affairs" (1986, 845; cf. Schmid 1992, 140, 164–65, 170–71), I do not think that his description of Nicias as incapable of dealing with uncertainty is adequate. More fundamental than his fear of uncertainty is his hope to secure his own well-being both in this life and afterwards. Only this account of Nicias explains why he is ultimately unwilling to endorse the view that courage is "virtue entire" and willing to leave open the possibility, which creates greater uncertainty, that courage is a part of virtue.

29. On the claim that it is *disinterested* action that the gods reward, see Plato, *Symposium* 179b–80b.

30. Thomas Aquinas indicated that the sort of super-courage, so to speak, prized by Nicias cannot rest on complete knowledge or the wholesale rejection of it but instead requires divine grace. Thomas argued that courage, as a virtue, enables man in the face of the greatest evils, especially bodily harm, to pursue the good prescribed by reason, which is ultimately happiness (1964, 2.2, Q. 123, A. 4, 5, 7, 12). But he also recognized the peculiar difficulties associated with courage and conceded that the spiritual delight that ordinarily accompanies virtue "fades away, as it were, before the immensity of physical pain" (A. 8). Indeed, the only way, he argued, it is possible to experience the delight that should always accompany virtue despite terrible physical pain is "through the boundless grace of God, which exalts the soul too powerfully to divine delights for it to be troubled by physical punishments." However, there are some evils and dangers that "transcend human nature" and whose escape are not "within human power to attain" (Q. 139 A.1). To confront these takes more than courage; it takes the "Gift of the Holy Spirit," namely, when one "is led to eternal life . . . and receives in his mind a certain confidence that this will be, refusing to admit the opposing fear." Thomas maintained that facing particularly terrible evils or dangers requires, so to speak, a leap of faith, or the hope that there is some good that comes from facing such evils.

31. It is instructive to note that this description of the courageous man does not include the premise, which Protagoras establishes in the *Protagoras,* that the good is identical to the pleasant (cf. *Protagoras* 351e1–4 with 351e5–7, 354c–d and 358b–c). This leaves open the possibility, in a way that the definition of courage established with Protagoras' premise does not, that the knowledge that Socrates here describes requires a certain toughness or steadfastness for support.

32. If it seems strange to characterize things that do not cause fear as emboldening, this description may make sense as an account of how a fearful man reacts to things that do not portend evil; Socrates may mean to capture everything that might embolden a man such as Nicias. Whether or not this is right, the category "non-evils" does embrace "positive" as well as "neutral" things.

33. Might not this account characterize Socrates' courage at Delium?

34. For Pericles' different response to an eclipse, see Plutarch 1887, 209.

35. James Nichols calls this quality "a natural temper of bravery" (1987, 274–75).

36. This suggestion might seem at odds with Socrates' ostensible conclusion in the *Protagoras* that courage is "*entirely* a matter of knowledge" of the terrible things and those that are not (361b, emphasis added). But we must remember that this conclusion is arrived at on the basis of Protagoras' premise identifying the pleasant with the good (see notes 2 and 29). And even in the *Protagoras,* Socrates' quiet encouragement to challenge their stated position (see 354b9, 354d1–3, and especially 355a–b) suggests that he does not share Protagoras' premise.

37. More specifically in a very compelling discussion of this puzzling fact, Hobbs argues that Socrates' *aporia* in the *Laches* is genuine. According to her argument, whereas Socrates in the *Laches* cannot explain how courage can at once demand the sacrifice of one's life and claim to constitute the greatest human flourishing, Plato's introduction of spiritedness in the *Republic* shows how this is possible and thus resolves a tension that had bedeviled Socrates (2000, 110–12). While I agree with Hobbs's articulation of the problem of courage in the *Laches,* I have argued that the *Laches* displays not Socrates' confusion but rather non-philosophic, human confusions about courage. And, as I will try to show in the chapters that follow, the tripartite soul in the *Republic* is Socrates' attempt to buttress problematic but potentially beneficial ordinary courage.

CHAPTER 4. THE NATURE OF SPIRITEDNESS

1. Strauss indicates that Socrates' primary concern in the dialogue in fact distorts the presentation of spiritedness (1964, 110–11).

2. Bloom suggests "heart" as another translation of the word (1991, 449n33). See especially Hobbs's very helpful discussion both of the meaning of *thumos* and of its general treatment in the literature (2000, 3–6).

3. For an argument that presents the connection between spiritedness and courage as primarily a male phenomenon, see Craig 1994, 64–66. For another penetrating treatment of this question, see Hobbs 2000, 68–74, and Kochin 2002.

4. Translations from the *Republic* are from Bloom 1991, modified where appropriate.

5. See Zuckert 1988, 3–6, for an enlightening discussion of how spiritedness supports civic life.

6. For a helpful description of how anger can be the source of courage, see Gay 1988, 257–59, 264.

7. Cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1116b31–17a9.

8. Cf. Pangle 1976, 1063.

9. Thomas' and Socrates' accounts of anger may, though, be closer than they first appear (which is why I speak only of Thomas' obscuring certain phenomena). Although Thomas suggests that the irascible desires derive wholly from the concupiscible ones, he also seems to point to the intimate connection between anger and justice. Although Thomas says that the irascible desires arise from and terminate in the concupiscible ones,

the example he offers to describe the connection between the two kinds of desires raises questions about whether anger is as derivative as he at first suggests, for he says that "anger arises from sadness and, having wrought vengeance, terminates in joy." What is open to interpretation is the claim that anger does not terminate in joy until it has wrought vengeance. This claim suggests that anger is satisfied not by the fulfillment of one's initial, thwarted desire but rather by obtaining justice.

For his part, Socrates may not think that spiritedness is as different from desire as he initially seems to suggest. In fact, his suggestion in Book IV that there is a separate, spirited part of the soul may belong only to a preliminary account of the soul, for later discussions undermine the division of the soul presented in Book IV. In Book VIII Socrates no longer speaks as though the parts of the soul are completely distinct; he describes the spirited part of the soul as having its own desires (550b). And in Book X he goes further, describing men's souls as divided only between a prudent or calculating part and a desiring part (604e1–3, 605b4–7, 606d2–7). The tripartite division of the soul that Socrates first articulates in Book IV may be designed more to bring out particularly vividly certain qualities of soul and to help foster the analogy between the city and the individual soul than to present a true account. Indeed, even as he describes the tripartite character of the soul, Socrates calls attention to difficulties in that account when he says that their procedure will not yield a "precise grasp" of the soul (435d; see also 436b, 504a–b).

10. Cf. Cross and Woozley 1966, 122.

11. For an excellent example of this investigation, see Stauffer 2001.

12. As Bloom notes, since most Greeks ate while sitting on the floor, it was a mark of wealth and social standing to eat from a low couch or cushions (1991, 448 n.30).

13. See also Kochin 2002, 49–50.

14. That Glaucon calls them sows—that is, *female* pigs—should be understood as yet an additional slur on the first citizens.

15. Glaucon is actually displaying a sentiment close to the one Achilles expresses when he complains to his mother that since his life was destined to be short, Zeus ought to grant him "honor at least" (*Iliad* I.352–54).

16. For a powerful expression of this belief in human seriousness, see Plato, *Laws* 803b–4c, 817a. But cf. *Republic* 604b–c.

17. Some commentators seem to think that Glaucon's demand represents Plato's own extremism or his "flight from the natural world" (see Barker 1925, 150; Nettleship 1937, 58–59). While I disagree that Glaucon's demand represents Plato's own view, I do think that it may indicate that *he*, Glaucon, wishes to "flee the natural world." I would, however, also maintain that his longing is hardly idiosyncratic; Glaucon represents the uniquely human longing for a meaningful and serious life.

18. Bloom's interpretive essay focuses on Glaucon's erotic nature (1991, 345–47). While I certainly do not mean to deny Glaucon's powerful eroticism or that his objection to the city of sows is also an erotic objection (he senses that it cannot supply him with the happiness for which he powerfully yearns), it seems to me that he is at least as spirited as he is erotic, as may be seen especially in that he is happiest with the city in speech when it is purged of luxuries and devoted to a self-denying virtue. See 399e; cf. Strauss 1964, 112.

19. Socrates describes the timocratic regime in Book VIII. Concerned above all with honor, particularly in war, according to Socrates it is second in virtue only to the best regime. It is thus a more virtuous regime than either oligarchy or democracy.

20. For an excellent discussion of the effect that the right role models can have on spirited individuals, see Hobbs 2000, 59–67.

21. On the importance of role models in cultivating and shaping honor, see the excellent discussions of how emulation can refine spirited characters and direct them to noble ends in Bunting 1998 and French 2003.

22. Cf. Craig 1994, which makes the provocative and intriguing argument that men with spirited natures are "the worthiest candidates for philosophy" (245). In making this argument, Craig strongly distinguishes between the loves characteristic of the spirited man—the love of honor and the love of victory—and maintains that the latter is far more educable, and hence desirable, than the former (75–78). Although these loves do have different objects, Craig's account of their differences seems somewhat forced. Craig rests much on the fact that Socrates says that good men are not lovers of honor but makes no parallel statement about the love of victory (75–76). Craig argues that this is due to the fact that honor-lovers always depend on other people's opinions, but lovers of victory "are open to be detached from the opinions of others, as the man who most loves honor can never be" (78). But Socrates does not distinguish so sharply between the love of honor and the love of victory (cf. 548c). Indeed, the love of honor and the love of victory are in fact very similar. Both are linked by a concern for demonstrating one's excellence. It is far from clear, moreover, that lovers of victory care less about others' opinions than do honor-lovers. Do they not wish to achieve victory before an audience? For another reason, Craig may reverse the proper hierarchy of the two loves (insofar as they should be distinguished): whereas the love of honor testifies to a love of virtue for the reason Aristotle proposes, the love of victory arguably leads one to measure oneself against another, rising or falling to the level of the competition.

23. As impressive as Glaucon is, as we will see, he cannot fully profit from Socrates' education. In addition to what we learn about Glaucon's limitations from the *Republic,* we also learn from the *Symposium* that he did not continue to associate with Socrates after the conversation that appears in the *Republic* (*Symposium* 172a–73b).

24. Craig does not address the degree to which Glaucon's apparent defense of injustice in fact bespeaks a longing for a noble life, not to mention a strong concern with honor (cf. Craig 1994, 113, with 360d–e). His inattention to this aspect of spiritedness prevents him from seeing what I will argue are the real problems and benefits of a spirited nature. Annas notes that Glaucon "stresses the need to praise justice for itself" rather than for its consequences and the implications of that demand. But she diminishes the power of that demand by saying that Glaucon and Adeimantus are "merely stressing different parts of the task" that they are setting for Socrates (1981, 60–66).

CHAPTER 5. THE GUARDIANS' EDUCATION IN COURAGE

1. Here I refer to the broad group of guardians that Socrates discusses through Book III. At the end of Book III, Socrates distinguishes what he identifies as the few true

guardians from the rest, and he suggests that the vast majority of those previously called guardians be called "auxiliaries" instead. Only a few become rulers and thus genuine guardians; the rest will be "helpers of the rulers' convictions" (412a–c, 414b). But while I am discussing Socrates' educational reforms through Book III, to which all of the first broad group appear to be subject, I will follow his lead in calling them all guardians.

2. The training that Socrates connects most explicitly to military activity focuses only on what will give the guardians' strong and healthy bodies, namely, exercise and good nutrition (404ff.).

3. See Saxonhouse 1988, 31–34, which offers a very helpful discussion of this aspect of Achilles' anger.

4. *Odyssey* X.494–95. I owe my awareness of the significance of this reference to Bolotin 1995, 85.

5. It is perhaps this hopefulness to which Socrates refers when he acknowledges that while inappropriate for the guardians of this city, Homer's tales of Hades are "poetic and sweet for the many to hear" (387b).

6. On this same point, see Miller 2000, 215.

7. For a different assessment of Achilles' character, see Mary Nichols 1987, 73, 77.

8. Saxonhouse maintains that Achilles' spiritedness subsides in this middle portion of the *Iliad* because he comes to believe that Agamemnon's inability to compensate him sufficiently reveals that a just distribution of goods is impossible (1988, 34). But even if Achilles does come to doubt Agamemnon's abilities, Saxonhouse overinterprets what this entails. In particular, she fails to consider that Achilles looks to the *gods* to effect justice when human beings fail to do so. After learning the lesson that Saxonhouse attributes to him, Achilles has ample time to return home but does not do so. His staying put testifies to the depth of his hopes for divine support for justice.

9. Thomas describes hope as an irascible desire, thus placing it in the same category as anger (1964 1.2, Q.123, A.3).

10. Hobbs argues that Achilles is a poor model for the guardians because of his tragic world view (2000, 210); his choice of a noble but dismal fate undermines Socrates' attempt to harmonize nobility and happiness in the souls of the guardians (217–20). While I agree with Hobbs's articulation of the problem facing Achilles and to some degree with her description of Socrates' goal, I do not think she sufficiently captures the degree to which Socrates shows that Achilles *thinks* that, with the intervention of the gods, he can harmonize nobility and happiness; thus I think that she overlooks Achilles' piety. The question of Achilles' piety is crucial, because it is through drawing attention to Achilles' piety that Socrates encourages us to consider the rationality of the expectations at the heart of spiritedness and thus whether spiritedness is *always* incompatible with genuine courage, understood as facing by oneself what is truly fearful.

11. For a different account of Achilles' courage and his wailing, see Kochin 2002, 39–51. Kochin questions whether Socrates inculcates courage at all in the guardians; he suggests instead that the guardians eschew tears because they are yielding to the traditional notion that sees "conquering the passions as manly and submitting to them as effeminate" (57; but see Socrates' statements at 399a–c and 411a). Kochin seems to resist calling the guardians' stoicism courage because he distinguishes between courage and this

kind of manly toughness. But I think Kochin underestimates the degree to which Socrates' critique of tears points to a genuine softness and hence cowardice. Thus, while I agree with Kochin that the guardians' courage falls short of true courage, I would argue that the evidence for this lies more in the fact that they are not truly stoic and tough but only struggle to appear so.

12. Mary Nichols argues that the guardians' education is intended to make them more attached to the city than to their families and friends (1987, 57, 59). This seems right, but it neglects the character of the desired attachment to *this* city, that is, the degree to which this education is necessary for the members of a city that is ruled by reason and that looks up to rational gods.

13. Cf. Jaeger 1957, 221–22, which claims that Socrates is merely trying to raise the moral tone of poetry in Greece. See also Guthrie 1975, 452. My argument is closer to Hobbs's, which argues that Socrates aims to establish a courage that is consistent with his overall effort to persuade Glaucon that virtue and happiness coincide (2000, 218). But whereas she argues that spiritedness makes it possible for virtue and happiness to coincide (229–31), I will argue in what follows that spiritedness is important for the guardians precisely because their education fails to reconcile their courageous service to the city with their happiness. In fact, it is spiritedness that enables them to *forget* the gap between those two values and still act as the city requires.

14. On the importance of Socrates' education as a revision of models for emulation and the role that spiritedness plays in this, see the excellent discussion in Hobbs 2000, 59–67.

15. While Odysseus ultimately does kill the suitors, he does so not in a fit of anger and when he is in a far more favorable position (*Odyssey,* XXII.380–90).

16. The Greek word is *hosious. Hosious* refers to what the gods have allocated to or require from men. In its primary sense the word refers to those things the gods grant to human beings—for example, the city is *hosious* if the temples, which the gods are understood to reserve to themselves, are sacred or *hieron*. The second sense refers to persons and indicates that a person has fulfilled all the duties that the gods expect of him. In the passage above, *hosious* appears in a list of adjectives that describe the condition of the guardians' souls; this suggests that among their virtues is a scrupulous attention to performing their duties toward the gods. For similar uses of *hosious,* see *Gorgias* 523b1 and *Euthyphro* 4e–5a, 5d–e, 6e–7a; for more on its translation, see West 1984, 45n17 and Pangle 1980, 518n7.

17. Indeed, Socrates suggests that immersion in beautiful arts might generate a concern for more permanent, universal notions. He implies that human beings who are educated in the arts and who truly care about being musical will have to know or understand not merely the particular virtues expressed by the arts but the "forms" or "ideas" (*eidei*) of those virtues themselves (402b–c; cf. 479a–b, 516a–c). Socrates thereby implies that in the best cases, the education in beauty can be the foundation for pursuing a much more complete education than the one thus far supplied. This implied suggestion becomes explicit a little further on when Socrates cautions Glaucon not to be confident that the guardians have really been "finely educated" from the musical and gymnastic educations alone (416b). For a good illustration of the effects of the guardians' education in beauty, see Nettleship 1937, 112–16.

18. Allowing and especially encouraging the passions underlying magnificence to flourish may well be at odds with cultivating the loyalty and obedience needed in the soldiers. To the extent that the guardians are led to find happiness in things other than the city, their love of beauty could turn them away from the city; this whole direction of the education raises serious questions about the viability of the city.

19. Glaucon and Adeimantus seem very much to be touchstones for the educational proposals outlined here. What they demand and what they accept set the boundaries for the education that is possible in the city in speech. Bruell contends that the education of the guardians in the city in speech is in part an education of Glaucon and Adeimantus (1994, 268–69). Cf. Craig 1994, 137–41.

20. Kochin argues that the guardians are educated so as to be devoted solely to military pursuits and that they fail to achieve happy, harmonious souls because their education does not transcend traditional notions of civic manliness (2002, 57). While I certainly agree with Kochin that the guardians' education is limited, I disagree about the precise character of this limitation. For Kochin's argument does not take into sufficient account the passages that show Socrates' efforts to inject a love of the beautiful into the young, by way of an immersion in beautiful arts and the cultivation of gracefulness, so that their devotion to the city will not make them miserable. Socrates' efforts here are crucial because they ultimately reveal that the guardians' failure to achieve harmonious souls is due less to their attachment to traditional masculinity than to the ordinary passions and hopes expressed though a high-minded spiritedness, which cannot be transcended without a full philosophic education.

21. Having very reasonably argued that the guardians' education is intended to make them happy, Reeve finds Socrates' claim that the guardians must always be prepared to do what is best for the city an "unexpected requirement" (1988, 158, 165–66, 179). He seems not to realize that the tensions between the interests of individual citizens and those of the city never disappear from Socrates' presentation; he uncritically accepts Socrates' "resolution," which asserts that those guardians who love the city most—its potential rulers—will believe that their good and the city's are identical (412c–d). According to Reeve, "unless we are to suppose that the rulers are deceived on this matter, a possibility excluded by the fact that their belief *must be true,* we must conclude that the rulers are selected with an eye both to what is advantageous to the polis and to what is advantageous for themselves" (181–82; emphasis added). The closest he comes, however, to arguing that "their belief must be true" is to appeal to Socrates' apportionment of rule to those who prove through harsh tests that they cannot be swayed from their determination to act always for the sake of the city (412e–13d). He naively assumes that if someone can hold onto this opinion under all circumstances, it must be true.

22. Most commentators recognize that what Socrates calls political courage is meant to be an inferior kind. See Nettleship 1937, 149; Friedlander 1964, 100; Cross and Woozley 1966, 105–6. But cf. Vlastos 1981, 136, 137n78, which suggests that the proposed education is in fact sufficient to inculcate genuine courage. Vlastos here ignores not only Socrates' references to the preparatory character of the education described in Books II and III (402a, 416b) but also Socrates' indication when discussing the guardians' political courage that a "finer treatment" of courage is possible.

23. For an argument along these lines, see Reeve 1988, 211, which argues that the noble lie is meant only to bolster what is true. According to Reeve, the noble lie is not a real lie because the citizens' "friendship is in fact well founded in mutual self-interest." For reasons stated in note 21 above, I disagree with Reeve's claim that a perfect congruence of interests exists between the guardians and the city.

24. The presence of a noble lie and of punitive gods in the city undermines claims such as Barker's that "the *Republic* is as much meant to prove and is as earnest in proving that the eternal laws of morality cannot be shaken by the skeptic" (1925, 63).

25. Hobbs argues that the properly educated spiritedness of the guardians enables them to be courageous in a way that transcends the tragic distinction between the noble and the good that Achilles embodied (2000, 218). Her argument rests on the claim that spiritedness likes what is beautiful and just and thus is reasonable when attached to reasonable opinions about the beautiful and just (229). Whether the guardians fully subscribe to such opinions, however, may be seriously doubted in light of the evidence marshaled in the text above both of the questionable identity of the city's and the individual guardian's advantage and of the external conditions imposed on the guardians. Hobbs herself acknowledges that honors remain important for the guardians, which at least raises the question of whether the tragic distinction Hobbs so skillfully describes in Achilles has truly been overcome (241).

26. In addition to what we observed in note 21 above, Reeve tries to dispose of the tension between the city's and the individual's good by arguing that the guardians have the inferior "political courage" only if philosopher-kings do not rule in the city (1988, 239), for if they do, then the guardians will exercise their courage with a view to what is best whether or not they are aware of it. But can the guardians' courage be the finest kind if they do not *know* that they are exercising it for the right reasons?

27. Although both Nettleship (1937, 149) and Friedlander (1964, 100) suggest that political courage is inferior because it rests on laws rather than on reason, neither asks whether reason and law disagree about the proper exercise of courage.

28. On the difficulties with the analogy between the city and the soul, see Annas 1981, 110–18, and Bloom 1991, 375.

CHAPTER 6. COURAGE AND PHILOSOPHY

1. The title of George W. Bush's Memorial Day address in Killean, Texas, "What Do We Owe the Brave?" expresses this sentiment (*New York Times,* May 30, 2000, A1).

2. Cf. Zuckert 1988, 6, which says that because the guardians are "bereft of any particular stake in the community," they "have no particular reason to serve it." This, however, may not be the case. Even though measures must be instituted to bolster their devotion to the city, the guardians' spirited desire for dignity may still inspire them to defend the city passionately.

3. See chapter 5, note 19 and context.

4. Glaucon is thus drawn to what Barker calls an "internal tyranny" of the soul, but Barker errs once again in attributing what is true of Glaucon to Plato (1925, 113). Glaucon may well believe that "the ideal condition of the soul is one in which reason has conquered

desire, erected a trophy and rules as a despot over the vanquished" (ibid.), but it is highly unlikely that Plato does, since this view is at odds with what Plato's Socrates describes as the happiness characteristic of a philosopher's soul, which is unified.

5. See Rosen's very eloquent formulation, in a different context, of why philosophy is needed for genuine virtue (1980, 91).

6. Indeed, this is how most commentators interpret it. Nettleship, for example, suggests that the idea of the good "occupies the place in regard both to morals and to science which the conception of God would occupy in a modern philosophy . . . if that philosophy considered the conception of God as essential to its system" (1937, 232–33). See also Barker 1925, 126–27; Wolin 1960, 46; Friedlander 1964, 112; Cross and Woozley 1966, 184–87; Guthrie 1975, 560.

7. For a similar claim, see Reeve 1988, 201, 231, 237–45. Nettleship, by contrast, implies that the good is something to which one is disinterestedly devoted when he says that the good is what is good "in proportion as it serves a wider purpose and ultimately the purpose or good of the order of the world" (1937, 221). He slights Socrates' indications that knowing the good is the source of the *individual's* happiness.

8. Socrates seems to recommend that philosophers serve the city whether or not doing so is good for them. Does this recommendation mean that philosophers acknowledge a standard other than the good by which they orient themselves? To answer this question we must note in the first place that Socrates' statement here applies *only* to the best regime, where the education of philosophers has been the primary objective. Second, as we have observed, Glaucon remains attracted by the extent to which the city can be an object of one's devotion. Thus, although he is initially loath to consider forcing the philosophers to return to the city when they are engaged in such splendid activity, he is easily persuaded that their doing so is necessary for the good of the city as a whole (519e); recall that unlike Adeimantus and Polemarchus, Glaucon was apparently untroubled by the extraordinary deprivations demanded of the guardians (419a and 449b–c). While the idea of devotion to the city may be what reconciles Glaucon to the philosophers' return to the city, Socrates stresses the need to persuade them that they themselves will benefit by ruling there for a time (520b–d).

9. Cf. Lutz's claim that in swearing by Apollo that the good is a "demonic excess," Glaucon indicates that he thinks of the good as something like a providential god who "might admit 'beautiful and good' lovers of the good to the Isles of the Blessed" (1997, 579). Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 80b.

10. Socrates' account of the Myth of Er at the end the of the *Republic* (614bff.) may seem to endorse Glaucon's hopes that his noble sacrifice will be rewarded in an afterlife, for the myth describes rewards and punishments meted out to the just and unjust. To the extent that the myth does in fact restore the external rewards and punishments that Glaucon and Adeimantus had initially insisted be removed, the myth implies that Socrates' defense of justice as good in itself has failed. But the myth does not in fact restore as much as it appears to. According to the myth, the choiceworthiness of virtue lies not so much in the reward as in the fact that only the man who is virtuous because of philosophy, that is, because he knows that and why it is truly good (619d–e), will choose the same life again. By contrast, those who are virtuous on any other grounds invariably choose an unjust life

for their next one, even after they have enjoyed the posthumous journey that is their reward. The myth thus in fact closely adheres to Socrates' account of justice as chosen most of all because it is understood by the just man to be the better life (618c–19a).

11. Hobbs has an intriguing discussion of how Socrates' account of the idea of the good attempts to unite virtue and happiness. She argues that Socrates unites the two by demonstrating in Book VI that the forms of the noble and the good are identical (222). The problem, however, is that she does not explain what would *justify* Socrates' treatment of the noble and good as identical or what would be the implication of such a treatment for our ordinary understanding of the nobility of virtue. This leads to a crucial unclarity in her discussion regarding the difference between philosophic and ordinary virtue. Despite her claim about the identity of their forms, she argues that the noble does not simply collapse into the good (227). To distinguish the two, she argues that something is noble insofar as it is perceived as beautiful and good insofar as it perceived as useful (227). But this does not help to clarify the character of virtue. For example, she speaks of the "morally valuable good" that spiritedness makes possible (228–29), but is this good to be understood as useful or beautiful? Hobbs goes on to concede that her account of the noble and good suggests that courage no longer "simply" means risk (234), but this still leaves open the question of whether the philosopher's courage is a "morally valuable good" in the same way the well-educated soldier's is. Because a loaded term such as "morally valuable good" cannot illuminate the relationship between these two kinds of courage, it risks obscuring the deepest aims and hopes of ordinary courage on the one hand, and distorting our understanding of the philosopher's singular kind of virtue on the other.

12. For a helpful account of the meaning of dialectics, see Nettleship 1937, 278–82.

13. Cf. Socrates' statements at 507a and 450d–e.

14. If scholarly interpretations of this passage are any indication, Glaucon's outburst may well suggest that he thinks the good is such a thing. Gadamer points out that Socrates' statement that the good is beyond all being "lends the idea of the good a transcendence that distinguishes it from all other noetic objects, which is to say all other ideas" (1986, 27). Annas similarly says that Socrates' account of the idea of the good suggests that to study it one must lose oneself in a disinterested contemplation of the forms (1981, 260). She notes, however, that this position conflicts with Socrates' aim to show that having a just soul leads to one's own happiness (266–67). Instead, however, of probing to discover why Socrates might put forth these contradictory positions, Annas explains away the contradiction as a problem with Plato's preference "for contemplation and theoretical study" and his consequent belief "that intellectual absorption will [not] make claims on a person that cannot be reconciled with the claims of practical judgment" (270).

15. For a different interpretation, see Klosko 1986, 163–64.

16. On this point, see Bruell 1994, 268 and Lutz 1997, 571–72.

17. The change in Glaucon is thus akin to the change in the honor-loving fathers of the *Laches,* who move from being displeased by their sons' spending time with Socrates to being eager that the boys do so.

18. While Socrates clearly presents philosophy as necessary for acquiring wisdom about true virtue and thus good as means to virtue, he also presents philosophy as good or fulfilling in itself—at least for full-fledged philosophers. He describes philosophy as the

"best pursuit" of which human beings are capable (489c, 495b) and philosophers, when they are philosophizing, as believing that they have "emigrated to a colony of the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive" (519c).

19. Strauss says that Plato in general abstracts from eros in the *Republic* and that this abstraction is "effective in the simile of the Cave in so far as that simile presents the ascent from the cave to the light of the sun as entirely compulsory" (1964, 128). Even if this is true, that is, even if Plato slights the erotic allure of the world outside the cave, this does not mean that there isn't some pain involved in leaving the cave. For a helpful account that treats escaping the cave as painful, see Nettleship 1937, 261–62.

20. Were Glaucon idiosyncratic, what may seem to him the painful prospect of the incoherence of transcendence would not strike other human beings the same way, and this particular explanation would not account for the suffering that leaving the cave causes others. In truth, though, justice understood as devotion to something grander than themselves appeals to the vast majority of human beings; although we might find extreme the challenge he poses to Socrates in Book II, there is at least a little bit of Glaucon in most of us.

21. For a very incisive discussion of this question, see Reeve 1988, 231–33.

22. Compare Annas 1981, 253, 259 and Mary Nichols 1987, 118–19, both of which deny that the philosopher actually seeks to leave the cave. But cf. 611e–12a and Strauss 1964, 128.

23. Both Nettleship (1937, 207) and Friedlander (1964, 110) suggest that Socrates has Alcibiades in mind here.

24. For a comic illustration of Socrates' youthful magnificence, see Aristophanes, *Clouds* 215–35.

25. Mary Nichols would likely dispute the claim that spiritedness is present, even in the early stage, in a truly philosophic nature. She argues that if it were present, it would distort and ultimately destroy true philosophy. She finds evidence for this argument in the philosopher-kings of the city in speech, whom she finds spirited; indeed, their spiritedness leads them erroneously to "renounce [the world of becoming] for one of simple beings." Spiritedness thus distorts philosophy by leading one to run away from the truth of the real world to the austere realm of pure being; the "greatest threat to the self," she argues, is "the familiar world of becoming," and rather than face up to it honestly, the philosopher-kings engage in merely spirited attempts "to preserve [themselves] against change and death" (1988, 62). On the one hand, Nichols seems to me to take too literally the rhetorical elements of Socrates' presentation of philosophy; she forgets that Socrates warns his audience that he is not speaking with perfect accuracy (507a). On the other hand, she underestimates the degree to which true philosophy according to Socrates does contain a longing for something that transcends the familiar world of becoming. She thinks that Socrates himself did not aim to escape the cave: philosophy as practiced by the philosopher-kings "is the repudiation of Socrates' philosophizing, which explores the familiar world that philosopher-kings escape," as can be seen in the fact that Socrates' conversations are "anchored in the individual natures of his interlocutors" (1988, 62, 64). The question Nichols does not address is whether Socrates conducts his conversations mainly with a view to what is good for his interlocutors or whether he tries to learn something for himself about the nature of being. It is worth noting that at the beginning of the *Republic* Socrates informs the reader that he is compelled to participate in this particular conversation

(327a–28b). The reader is thus on notice that Socrates' concerns and aims are not exhausted by those that are demonstrated here.

26. Craig sharply distinguishes the higher forms of spiritedness that help one philosophize from lower manifestations (such as anger) to such a degree that he claims that they should be understood as two separate parts of the soul (1994, 104). By contrast, I argue that these manifestations are not just rooted in but fundamentally characterized by a particular belief in the noble transcendence whose rational grounds we have seen are fraught with difficulty.

27. Hobbs argues that a properly educated spiritedness is crucial to the philosophic soul. According to her, it is the phenomenon that rectifies the *Laches'* unsatisfactory treatment of courage (2000, 135–36). But it is unclear in her account why spiritedness remains necessary in a full-fledged philosopher's soul. She argues, after all, that genuine virtue results from knowledge of the good (231). But as I have argued, the *Republic* suggests that in its human manifestation, spiritedness involves a momentary *forgetting* of our good accompanied or driven by an opinion of questionable rationality, namely, that we are *owed* something. Indeed, this opinion is at the heart of the concern with honor and dignity, which, as Hobbs notes, are the problematic and even irrational motivations of the spirited part of the soul (241–42). But if a philosopher sees the irrationality of this opinion and knows his true good, it is unclear that he would have such a powerful, irrational opinion. Hobbs seems to see this problem at 241 but then retreats from the implications of it at 243–44 and 266–77.

28. Klosko cites Book IV's definition of courage as a "power of preserving" as evidence that Plato rejects Socrates' view that courage is a kind of knowledge (1986, 53). But as Klosko himself recognizes, in Book VI Socrates "discusses a higher form of virtue, based on knowledge" (77), and he recognizes that this "discussion" includes a higher form of courage. He does not, however, understand this knowledge as imparting anything more than a firmer basis for using one's power of preserving in a reliably moral way (78–79). For a position similar to Klosko's, see Irwin 1977, 198–99, 201–2.

29. Hobbs suggests that even if the philosopher sees his true good clearly, approaching it still takes "mettle" (136) and not simply "a cool mind" (243), both of which she characterizes as forms of spiritedness. That the philosopher needs both mettle and a cool mind may be true, but it is unclear whether such toughness is accurately characterized as spiritedness. At least as Plato presents the human manifestation of spiritedness, it is always accompanied by problematic opinions (see chapter 4).

30. See also *Symposium* 203d5, 219d2, and *Phaedo* 64a.

CONCLUSION. THE PROMISE OF COURAGE

1. See Hobbes 1994, 34, which defines "felicity" as "continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth." (This of course is to say not just that enjoying comfortable self-preservation cannot give us the lasting happiness we think we desire but also that no other way of life can either.)

2. In this context, see Sommers 2000, especially 134–36 and 185–98, for an instructive account of how contemporary educational theories discourage the more promising aspects of spiritedness and for a description of its negative consequences, particularly for young men.

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